



BUILDING SPIRITUAL HOMES
LIVING *our values* **TOGETHER**



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Publisher

Seventh-day Adventist® Church

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iCOR

... has been developed by the Inter-European Division (EUD) and the Trans-European Division (TED) and is an instrument of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church for value-oriented growth.

... is intended to help churches recognize their values and live them out together across all generations in everyday church life, because this will strengthen their vitality and make them relevant for their communities.

... is a guide intended to aid churches in becoming supportive spiritual homes.



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CHURCHES (FULL) OF VALUE



Mario Brito

*President of the Inter-European Division
of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church*

iCOR is the result of mature reflection and careful research on how to stop and reverse the steady and deadly bleeding that has been depriving our churches of their youngest and most promising elements.

The retention and active involvement of the younger members in the activities and mission of our church will bring abundant life, contagious joy, and the assurance of a bright future for the Adventist family.

There is nothing better to reach this goal than having a church where young and old support each other, fellowship together and, united, reach out to those around them with the eternal Gospel message.



Barna Magyarosi

*Secretary of the Inter-European Division
of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church*

iCOR is an initiative built on biblical values and principles of church growth. It envisions a community of believers that embodies the intergenerational message of “Elijah,” and brings it to fruition by turning the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers (Mal. 4:6). Jesus’ command of making disciples cannot be a sporadic effort of the church. It has to become its lifestyle and its core business. This is what iCOR is designed to accomplish.



Raafat Kamal

*President of the Trans-European Division
of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church*

iCOR is a positive and credible instrument both as a conductor and a disseminator of core biblical values, which provides an opportunity for all generations to live these values out together. This needed tool covers a broad spectrum of issues relating to a healthy climate in the church that is essential for the emotional, spiritual and social well-being of all, but especially young people. iCOR seeks positive transformation in the lives of young people not just by encouraging church leaders to take better care of them, but even more by challenging the leaders to consider the youth as real partners in the life of the church. The Trans-European Division is committed to promoting spiritual growth and leadership in our young people. iCOR is one of the guides that can help us make the Gospel of Jesus Christ a reality through a relational and participatory process.



“Even the heavenly beings recognize the wisdom of God through you and me, through how we live together as a church! That pretty much says it all—except for one more thing: that vision of the church definitely makes it worthwhile to open the pages of this study guide, enter into the presence of God with a reverent and quiet spirit, and then study and fellowship together.”



JONATAN TEJEL

Youth Ministries Director of the Inter-European Division

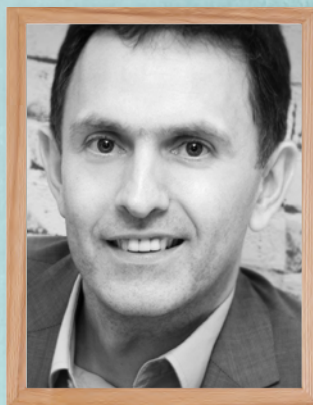
I am a PK. As a child I moved from city to city following the calls my father got as a pastor. Every time we moved, I felt the fear of going to church, wondering if I would be accepted, loved and considered important. A church with no love loses its meaning and stops growing. One of the reasons for the 1st century church's growth was the way they loved each other and the world. Love should be a defining characteristic of the local church. I still remember the churches I have been a member of: in some, people were accepted rapidly, and in others, you had to be very strong in your beliefs to keep on attending. As a member of a local church today, I would love to see iCOR implemented in my community because it helps the church to become the instrument of Jesus on earth. I highly recommend iCOR.



RAINER WANITSCHKE

Ministerial Association and Family Ministries Director of the Inter-European Division

Coming home. Being loved. Sharing joy and suffering. Not being lonely. Fellowship. Being accepted—despite failure and unresolved problems. Talking and silence. Being who I am. Being changed by encouraging encounters. Studying the Word of God and believing fearlessly. Praying. Being cared for and caring for others. Creating a spiritual home and safe refuge for people of all generations and cultures. This is iCOR—for me, the basis of church development and the implementation of God's mission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."



ZLATKO MUSIJA

Youth Ministries Director of the Trans-European Division

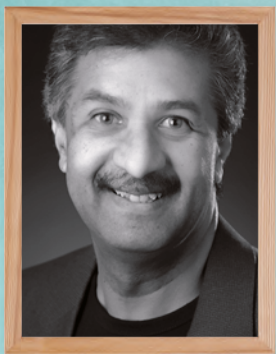
If we want to nurture and retain our youth, we should do our best to foster a church climate that respects, integrates and cares for all generations. iCOR is an excellent tool that can help local churches become supportive and spiritual environments where everybody is embraced, needed and involved. The church will grow more when the youth are regarded as missionary work of the highest kind and at the same time invited to be significant participants in its mission. iCOR is an effective instrument that can help local church leaders become more attentive to the spiritual needs of the youth and more tactful and wise in discipling them.



PATRICK JOHNSON

Ministerial Secretary and Discipleship Coordinator of the Trans-European Division

I believe the future of the church depends on the quality of its relationships. iCOR, with its emphasis on inclusive relationships, has the potential to foster and develop relationships that would especially result in our youth developing healthy connections across generations. Any church that understands the three core principles, and is committed to living according to the ten fundamental values that iCOR espouses, will be attractive for youth in any culture. I recommend iCOR as a practical tool for playing our part in fulfilling Jesus' mission to make disciples of all nations.



GILBERT CANGY

Former Youth Ministries Director of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church

Over the last few years, internal and external empirical research has come to confirm what we already knew by experience: namely, the church is faced with a major attrition problem, particularly among its young adult population. It is in that context that iCOR comes as a breath of fresh air. The GC youth advisory in 2015 took an action to formally adopt iCOR as one of its major initiatives for the world church; in early 2016, the General Conference Leadership Council endorsed iCOR as part of its strategy to address nurture and retention for the church in general. 1. iCOR spends very little time in diagnosis and goes straight to the solution; 2. iCOR targets the local church; 3. It is not a time-based program, but calls for a foundational cultural shift in the way we do church; 4. It dismantles generational segregation and fosters the notion of church as a family; 5. It is holistic; 6. It is practical and fully resourced. If I were a local church pastor, I would make iCOR an integral part of my church life moving forward. I fully recommend iCOR.



GARY BLANCHARD

Youth Ministries Director of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church

Seventh-day Adventists are not better than other Christians but we've been given a greater responsibility! Jesus gave our church the very last message of warning and hope to the world before He returns! I believe that young people were designed by God to be the wings of the Three Angels Message! Interestingly Ellen white confirms this when three times she writes "how soon" "how soon" "how soon" the gospel will go to the world through "rightly trained" youth (*Education*, p. 271). However, without intentionally incorporating the values of iCOR in our churches, we will find our "wings" clipped. We cannot continue to lose our young people at frightening rates; we desperately need them!

Intergenerational Churches of Refuge (iCOR) are churches where young people are loved, befriended and empowered by the members. I highly recommend this resource and support this initiative. I challenge pastors, youth leaders, parents and everyone who loves the younger generation to do the same. God is even now "turning the hearts of the fathers back to the children" (Malachi 4:6).



KATIA REINERT

Health Ministries Associate Director of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church

I am very enthusiastic about iCOR! The principles of building relationships, fostering empowerment, nurturing spiritual growth, and engaging youth in mission are not only biblical but reflect Jesus' method of relating to people with compassion, walking with them in their spiritual journey, and empowering them to share His love with a broken world. We have incorporated the iCOR discipleship model in the revised Youth Alive program and look forward to what God will do in helping us embrace and disciple His children like never before.

A WORD FROM THE AUTHORS



GUDRUN GATTMANN

Teacher, mediator, author

“I grew up in a church where I felt accepted, needed and respected as a youth. The impact of this still lasts today. To instill this feeling—the feeling of family and home—in youth today is one of the goals of iCOR. I find that fascinating and worth working for. Working together is what makes us strong as a church!”



RUBEN GRIECO

Director, Adventist Youth Ministries in Germany

“My conviction and enthusiasm for iCOR has its roots in my personal history. Being of Italian-Spanish parentage and having grown up in the German region of Swabia, I felt out-of-place everywhere I went. It was in the church that I first experienced the feeling of being at home. There were older people who got involved to support children and youth—and me—and who invested their trust in me, allowing me to tackle challenges myself. Through iCOR, I can in turn help establish a framework that will support all generations as they work together to make their church a spiritual home.”



DAGMAR JANSSEN

Youth education advisor in Middle Rhine

“I am convinced that the iCOR vision of creating a supportive spiritual home and living out values together is the church-growth concept for the future. When people of all genders, ages and cultures work together to shape life and fellowship in the church, then everyone will benefit. In these churches, the experience of diversity comes alive. This is where people who love each other in all their variety come together. This kind of trusting fellowship is something people long to be a part of, so that church growth practically happens all by itself.”



BERT SEEFELDT

Director, Adventist Youth Ministries in Germany

“Relationship-oriented; interested in a dialog; welcoming and encouraging participation: that’s the kind of church I would like to have. For me, iCOR is an instrument that helps me and my church to become more like that. That’s why, for me, iCOR is also pure mission: because I am convinced that nothing better reflects the essence of mission than when we succeed in making the kingdom of God experienceable among us here and now.”



MARK SEEFELDT

Pastor in Berlin

“We often take the presence of children and young people in our churches for granted: but most of them have not yet become converted believers. This group should therefore be the very first that we strive to reach with the love of God. iCOR understands church to be an intergenerational family in which we all care for one another. When iCOR is lived out, each church member, each young person and each guest should experience the most important thing that should characterize the disciples of Jesus and therefore also the church: *love*.”



STEPHAN SIGG

President, Swiss Union of SDA

“iCOR is about the real mission of Christ’s church family, namely living as the church of God. The mission scientist Bryan Stone puts it in a nutshell: That is the central concern of iCOR: believers of all generations living authentic fellowship as an active witness to the world. iCOR has the goal of living discipleship holistically, and with the help of empirical research, it fosters and promotes central biblical values for the church.



MARKUS VOSS

Pastor in Greifswald

“What fascinates me about iCOR is the fact that young and old can re-discover their faith together, be there for each other, learn from each other, and grow together and grow closer to Jesus Christ. Where churches live out these values, people who are searching can also get to know God in an appealing way.”

WHAT IS “CHURCH”?

What comes to mind when you think of “church”? For some, the association is primarily with a church as a building, a sacred place; a place where you encounter God and enter into His presence. In the past it would have been called a temple. It’s no coincidence that, for example, the English word “sanctuary”, which means a holy or consecrated place, is often used for a church building or place of worship.

Others view church primarily as an experience: church is not just a **place**; it is an **event**. Attending church, then, usually means participating in or even being involved in conducting a religious meeting or worship service. This is conducted according to a certain plan and includes liturgical elements. The spiritual program may be appealing and inspiring, or instead perhaps aggravating so that some may no longer attend. Some people think we should make an event out of church and conduct the worship service in a more modern and professional way.

Others associate church above all with institutionalism, rigid structures and inflexible worldviews and beliefs. They view church either as a guardian of tradition and trustworthiness, or as an irrelevant subculture that is out of touch with the world we live in.

For still others, the church organization, with its history, representatives and peculiarities, is a very important factor in their identity that gives meaning to their own personal faith. There are also those for whom church is just a partnership of convenience for the purpose of proclaiming the word of God and evangelizing the world as fast as possible, because time is short.

Church means a lot of things. Church—above all, that means you and your “brother” or “sister” in faith. Church—ultimately, that means **us**, a community of those for whom Jesus is Savior, Lord and Friend. Church—that is how and what we live together in faith. What church means can be compared in a biblical sense with a garden of God, with a joyful celebration, with a living organism, with the body of Christ, with a community of practical partnership and solidarity, with a place of refuge and a family where you can feel and make yourself at home.

What does church mean for you? How do we want to live out and shape the church of Christ? What is most important in that process? What purpose does Jesus have in mind for us as His church? That is exactly what we want to think about and discuss together—both young and old—with the help of this *iCOR Study Guide*. The iCOR initiative can help your congregation discover and live out core church values and provide assistance as your church strives to be a supportive spiritual home for all generations. Jesus identifies Himself with you **and** your neighbor, and He is present among us wherever we come together as a vibrant community living out fellowship in His name—that is, identifying ourselves with Him, and with Him at the center of our fellowship (Matt. 18:20). As the church, we are God’s mission in this world.

Stephan Sigg

Author and iCOR initiative developer



HOW IT WORKS

The *iCOR Study Guide* is like a periscope for you and your church. Inspired by the Greek words for “look” (*skopein*) and “around” (*peri*), it helps you to look at and discuss the themes and church values of the iCOR initiative from different perspectives and standpoints.

Even though this study guide with its 13 weekly lessons is well suited for personal study and your daily devotionals over the course of a quarter, it is also intended to entice you out of your solitude and lead you into an intergenerational dialog with your brothers and sisters in faith in your church. This can take place in a mixed-age Sabbath School class, in the context of a series of iCOR seminars in your church, in existing home Bible study groups, or in small groups specifically organized for this reason.

This is because church is built together—by young and old united. But for that to succeed you must have common values, remain in constant dialog with each other and create a supportive spiritual home together. This study guide can assist you and your church in this process.

HOW IS IT STRUCTURED?

The *iCOR Study Guide* is structured similarly to the Sabbath School Bible Study Guides. It contains 13 weekly lessons that are each divided into 6 daily sections or perspectives. Various questions and activities help you and your iCOR discussion group explore the topics more deeply and at a practical level.

BIG PICTURE

The two-page **BIG PICTURE** gives you an overview of the specific iCOR study theme with its 6 **PERSPECTIVE** sections right at the beginning of the week’s study guide, and can be used as a basis for the group discussion.

PERSPECTIVE

At the **focal point** of a **PERSPECTIVE** section are one or more central Bible texts that **focus** on the most important aspects of the study topic. You will have the greatest benefit if you not only read the quote, but also the Bible texts that are listed, and actively work through the questions and thought-provoking proposals and activities that you find in the **Practical Perspective** section.

SPOTLIGHT

Each iCOR study theme closes with the **SPOTLIGHT** page that provides further food for thought, whether with a picture, a quote, or references and suggestions for relevant websites, material and further reading.

The authors of this book have a common dream, a dream that the *iCOR Study Guide* will help you and your church to discover central biblical values, to explore them more deeply, and ultimately to live them out across all generations. This dream can become reality. You can make the start today!



GOD IS LOVE

1



“‘God is love’ is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass.”

Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 10.

GOD IS LOVE

FOCAL POINT → 1 John 4:7–21 / John 13:34–35 / Galatians 5:22–23

› MOTIF

What we think about love is essentially and inseparably connected with our concept of God. There is no more fundamental statement in the Bible about the nature of God than the declaration: “God is love.” Our concepts of faith, salvation, sanctification and the church must be oriented on and measured by this central teaching. Disciples of Jesus are ultimately disciples of love, because God is love and true discipleship is recognized by how love is lived out practically.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: Love is not just a characteristic that God has; rather, it is His nature

John emphasizes twice that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). John doesn’t say, “God is like love,” or, “God is loving.” The statement is not a description of a characteristic that God has; rather, it tells us what the nature of God is.

❓ *How does this statement affect your concept of God?*

❓ *To what extent does your concept of God correspond with this statement?*

John writes: “Anyone who does not love does not know God” (v. 8, NLT), and: “If we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?” (v. 20, NLT).

❓ *Why can’t loving God be separated from loving others, especially our fellow brothers and sisters?*

❓ *What does that mean for us as a church that claims to follow God?*

Perspective 2: Love is not simply a feeling; it is a command

Jesus declared the commandment of love to be the greatest commandment and said that everything in the law and the prophets is anchored in this. Therefore the entire Old Testament tradition stands or falls with the commandment of love.

❓ *Why is that so?*

❓ *In a debate between Jesus and a teacher of the law, the expert on the Scriptures gave a correct answer (Luke 10:25–37), but was nevertheless completely wrong. Why?*

Perspective 3: Love is not a minor subject; it’s the major discipline

Paul says that love is the goal of instruction (1 Tim. 1:5). Therefore the goal of the Christian faith is not as much knowledge as possible, but rather as much love as possible.

❓ *Can you agree?*

❓ *Why is knowledge useless without love?*

Perspective 4: Love is not just a label; it’s a trademark

Jesus gave the disciples a new commandment. They should love one another. Read John 13:34–35.

❓ *What would you say is the trademark of your church?*

- ❓ *Why is loving one another the most convincing argument for true discipleship and the church of God?*
- ❓ *How can the way the people and generations in the church live together distinguish itself from how life is outside it?*

Perspective 5: Love is not justification; it's sanctification

We could never do enough to deserve heaven, not even by being loving. But heaven will be filled with people who are loving. We are called and empowered by the love of God for us to love one another. It's about growing in love.

- ❓ *Why can we understand love as an expression of joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?*
- ❓ *What would be the consequences for us if we understood growing in love as the goal of our sanctification?*

Perspective 6: Love is not temporary; it lasts forever

Love never ends: it lasts forever because God is love, and His commandment of love applies for all eternity. Love is and remains the foundation for all life that God has created. Beyond that, for Peter, the call to love is the essence of the end-time message to the church.

- ❓ *Is love given the importance in your church that it has according to the Bible and for our faith?*
- ❓ *Why is the call to "love even more" a central aspect of the end-time message to the church (1 Peter 4:7-10)?*

What we think about love is essentially and inseparably connected with our concept of God. There is no more fundamental statement in the Bible about the nature of God than the declaration: "God is love."

LOVE IS NOT AN ATTRIBUTE; IT'S THE ESSENCE OF BEING

P1

FOCAL POINT → 1 John 4:7–21

› FOCUS

When we try to describe a person, we usually resort to adjectives. For example, we say that someone is big or attractive. The person we are describing can be funny or intelligent, or instead mean or grumpy. Descriptions can be positive or negative. There's almost no end to the list of adjectives: that is, of words that describe what or how someone is like. In the Bible we also find many descriptions of God. There are many places where it tells us what God is like and what He can be compared with. This is certainly a central statement: "The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love" (Ps. 103:8, NLT). He is also just and powerful, holy and good.

There are indeed many possibilities for describing God's attributes, but there is only one way to describe His nature. God is love. Notice that John doesn't say that God is like love; neither does he say that God is loving. No: God is love. That is not a description, but the designation of His essential being. Therefore John can also say: "God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them" (1 John 4:16, NLT). There is actually no other statement in the Bible that so directly and fundamentally defines the nature of God's being. Because God is love, nothing is more important for His children than themselves to be like He is.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *What is the difference between simply saying God is loving, and saying He is love?*
- ❓ *John writes: "Anyone who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8, NLT), and: "If we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?" (v. 20, NLT). Why can't loving God be separated from loving others, especially our fellow brothers and sisters?*
- ❓ *What does that mean for us as God's church?*

"One of the strongest evidences of true conversion is love to God and man."

Ellen G. White¹

LOVE IS NOT A FEELING, BUT A COMMANDMENT

P2

FOCAL POINT → Matthew 22:34–40 / Mark 12:28–31 / Luke 10:25–37

› FOCUS

We find the issue about the greatest or most important commandment in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. In Matthew and Mark, it is a question posed to Jesus. Jesus answers it by connecting together the Old Testament commandments to love God (Deut. 6:5) and to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18). He emphasizes that there is no commandment that is more important (Mark 12:31) and that the entire law and the prophets are summed up in this twofold commandment. For His listeners back then, it was clear that Jesus was referring to the entire Old Testament writings. Ultimately, everything revolves around this commandment of love. That's what God is all about.

“Faith and love are the essence of the Christian. Faith receives, love gives. Faith draws you to God, love draws you to other people. By faith you allow God to do good for you, by love you do good for others.”

Martin Luther²

In the Gospel of Luke, the commandment of love turns up in a different context. There, Jesus is not asked about which commandment is the greatest, but rather about what you have to do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus answers the question of the teacher of religious law with a question of his own. “What is written in the law?”—that is, in the Torah. Surprisingly, the teacher of the law gives the commandment of love as the answer: just like Jesus had answered when He was asked about the greatest commandment. “Right!” Jesus replies, “Do this and you will live!” (Luke 10:25–28, NLT). The commandment of love, which also includes the commandment to our enemies (Matt. 5:43–45), is humanly impossible to keep fully and reveals that we need forgiveness and salvation from God. Jesus provides the teacher of the law with an illustration of the commandment of love, and in particular of love for our neighbors, with the story of the good Samaritan. In particular, it is the religious people—both the priest and the Levite were just going to or returning from their ministry in the Temple in Jerusalem—who fail to keep the commandment of love.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ How can one agree with Jesus, and yet, like the teacher of the law, still get things completely wrong?
- ❓ What does it mean for you to be a neighbor for others?
- ❓ Today, consciously be a neighbor for the people you encounter, and at the end of the day write down what you experienced.

LOVE IS NOT A MINOR SUBJECT; IT'S THE MAJOR DISCIPLINE

P3

FOCAL POINT → 1 Corinthians 8:1–3; 13:1–3

› FOCUS

Experts emphasize again and again that the mere transfer of knowledge cannot be the purpose of education. It is postulated that developing the character and forming the personality are more important than acquiring purely factual knowledge. This can hardly be contradicted, although neither a Pythagorean equation nor a simple percentage calculation can be solved using a good character. Nevertheless, education is not mere knowledge. This is particularly true when it comes to our faith in God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowledge alone can make us arrogant. We can be right, but in a very loveless and destructive way. “Knowledge puffs up while love builds up” (1 Cor. 8:1, NIV).

The Greek word for faith, *pistis*, also means trust. Trust is supported by knowledge, for example by the fact that I already know someone or already have experience with something. But trust is also much more than that. Trust, and therefore also faith, are relational concepts. If faith were just about merely believing something to be true or having knowledge of heavenly things, then Satan would be the biggest “believer” (see James 2:19). He and the fallen angels lived in the presence of God. Nowhere does the Bible claim that we come closer to God simply through knowledge or understanding. Knowing God and the truth is much rather about growing in love—love for God and our neighbor. Where love is missing, all knowledge is useless. The goal of passing on faith is therefore not just communicating knowledge of the Bible or achieving acceptance of doctrinal teachings, but much rather living a life of following Jesus that is dedicated to loving God and our fellow human beings.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *If I had knowledge without love, I would be nothing. Is the opposite also true?*
- ❓ *How do you show that you know God?*
- ❓ *How do you want to pass your faith on to others, and what is your experience with how faith is passed on in your church?*

“The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith.”

1 Timothy 1:5 (NLT)

LOVE IS NOT JUST A LABEL; IT'S A TRADEMARK

P4

FOCAL POINT → John 13:34–35; 15:9–17

› FOCUS

Misleading labeling can be quite aggravating—for example, when what you find on the inside is not what it says on the outside, or when something is claimed or promised that does not correspond with reality. But if the experiences I make with a product are positive, the label becomes a trademark. The trademark is an indication of the quality of the content. It is quite similar with the church.

Jesus explains that loving one another is the actual trademark that distinguishes His disciples. The world, and therefore people who do not know God, recognize true discipleship by the love lived out among them. Whether or not we are a follower of Jesus is therefore not so much defined by the place where we gather or by the way our church service is structured or by the teachings we uphold. The followers of Jesus should above all be recognized by the way they treat each other and live their lives together. The life of the church therefore is an indication of what God is like. When love thrives among the followers of Jesus, God becomes believable. Where the Gospel can be experienced practically, Jesus becomes tangible. For Jesus, this trademark of His disciples is so important that He emphasizes it with a “new commandment” for His disciples: “This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you” (John 15:12, NLT).

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What would you write on the label of your church?
- ❓ What does it say, and what is found inside?
- ❓ What would you say is the trademark that distinguishes your church?
- ❓ What can you contribute to it?

“When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted.”

Ellen G. White³

LOVE IS NOT JUSTIFICATION; IT'S SANCTIFICATION

P5

FOCAL POINT → Galatians 5:22–23 / Colossians 3:12–15

› FOCUS

We could never do enough to deserve heaven, not even by being loving. But heaven deserves to be filled with people who are loving. In the Bible, heaven represents a place where life is free from sin and therefore from everything that destroys genuine relationships. Ultimately, salvation is about reestablishing and restoring life as it was originally created by God. This was a life of harmony (in Hebrew: shalom) between the Creator, created beings and all of creation. Through the unwavering love of God in Jesus (Rom. 8:38–39), we already take part in the life of this new or restored reality. We are therefore also called and empowered to learn to live our lives the way God intended them to be. We are created for living in relationships, and the foundation of genuine relationships is love. The commandment to love therefore reveals the path to genuine fulfillment in life.

Love for God, our neighbor, and ourselves: this is the model of life we follow. This is what we are to grow and mature in. This is what we are here to do and practice. In heaven there will only be loving people. We should therefore understand sanctification first and foremost as growth in love. This is what Paul means when he describes love as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Since Paul doesn't speak of the **fruits** of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, but only of **one fruit**, many Bible scholars argue that he is describing the love of God like an orange that is made up of multiple segments. Love as the fruit of the Spirit therefore reveals itself in very practical things and in how we interact with others in our everyday relationships. Every aspect of this fruit is ultimately a relational concept and only exists in relationships and interaction with others. A very similar description is found in Colossians 3:12–15.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *Why can we understand love as an expression of joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?*
- ❓ *Where have you yourself experienced love that expressed itself in this way?*
- ❓ *What would be the consequences for us as a church if we were to understand growing in love as the goal of our sanctification?*
- ❓ *Do you have any ideas for how we could grow together in this respect?*

“True sanctification comes through the working out of the principle of love.”

Ellen G. White⁴

LOVE IS NOT TEMPORARY; IT LASTS FOREVER

P6

FOCAL POINT → 1 Peter 4:7–10 / 1 Corinthians 13:8–13

› FOCUS

As Adventists, we believe in the return of Christ, and therefore that Jesus will keep His promise. An “Adventist faith” can be found in many sincere believers from Abraham (Heb. 11:8–10) up to the present day. The apostle Peter was so convinced that the return of Christ would soon take place that he wanted to prepare the church for the event: “The end of the world is coming soon” (1 Pet. 4:7, NLT). Peter had every reason to believe that. For one, the growing persecution of the believers was a sign in contemporary history. For another, there was the experience of the ascension of Jesus, where an angel told the amazed disciples that they would see Jesus returning

“What remains for us, we find in God. Because of love, He came into the world and died for us. What God did out of love remains, and that can happen again for us today, where His love for us inspires us to love. What we do because of love, that remains, even when it happens quietly and unseen, because God’s love inspires us to love. Love remains.”

Cae Gauntt⁵

the same way they had seen Him go up to heaven (Acts 1:11). The end of the world is at hand! What should we do in the light of the imminent end? What should the church do? How should we prepare ourselves? Peter said: Be earnest and disciplined and pray. Don’t jump into fanatical hyperactivity or senseless behavior, but pray. Hold on to your relationship with God. But, above all, maintain constant love for one another and serve each other with the gifts God has given you, so that God will be exalted through Jesus in everything you do for one another. Be earnest; pray, love and serve. Peter understands the call to love to be the real end-time message for the church. In view of the near end, it’s important to live our lives just like we will live together on the new earth: in loving relationships with God and each other. Love never ends; it lasts forever, because God is love, and His commandment of love applies for all eternity. Love is the foundation for all life that God has created. That was true in the beginning, it is true now, and it will always be true. Faith, hope and trust in God find their fulfillment at the return of Christ. But love is greater, love will remain, because love is what life is all about.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What do you think about the fact that Peter emphasizes love and serving our neighbor as the end-time message for the church?
- ❓ What does that mean for you and for us as the Adventist Church?

According to the Bible, love is the central concern of God, because God is love. Love is the goal of all God's revelation, because it is the foundation of the law and the prophets. Jesus declared love for each other to be the central characteristic distinguishing His church, because that is how the world recognizes that we are His disciples. Growth in love is what sanctification means, and through it we are to become more "love-full," for love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. If that is true, shouldn't living a life of practical love be at the focus of our personal spiritual life and our common church culture?

THE FAMILY OF GOD

2



The family is a central symbol for understanding our faith and the church.

THE FAMILY OF GOD

FOCAL POINT → **Romans 8:15–16 / Mark 10:28–30 / Ephesians 2:19–22 / Philippians 2:1–5**

› MOTIF

The iCOR initiative is based on the biblical understanding that God created two fundamental social units that foster spiritual growth and through which faith is primarily passed on and supported: the nuclear family and the extended family. The family defines a social living space of generations in which people are there for each other, supporting and encouraging each other. Family stands for a community where you are accepted and welcomed, and where you feel at home and find true refuge.

The New Testament in particular talks about our relationship with God in terms of family. God is our Father and we are His children. This not only defines our fundamental relationship to God, but also to each other. Ultimately, it is only through Jesus that this relationship actually becomes possible and is clearly defined. He Himself declares the church to be **His family**. That means that, in the church, believers find hundreds of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and therefore important supporters and role models for life as followers of Christ in this world.

There is no more significant illustration or fundamental concept of the church in the New Testament than the family. The metaphor of the family places relationships and how we live together at the focus of the church. The church is a loving, caring and supportive intergenerational community that strengthens its members and helps them to connect with Jesus and to develop their full potential in their relationship with God.

In times when more and more people are longing for a sense of belonging and authentic relationships, living together as an extended family of God in this world is again becoming one of the strongest arguments in favor of the Gospel.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: “Abba, my dear Father”

It is not presumptuous, but a spiritual fact: we can call God “Father” and thus “Daddy.”

- ❓ *What does that mean for you personally and for your relationship with God?*
- ❓ *All those who have God as their Father are therefore also brothers and sisters. What does that mean for us a church?*

Perspective 2: The church, the family of Jesus

In today’s society we have a strong individualistic tendency.

- ❓ *What value do the community and the collective body have for you and your faith?*
- ❓ *For many people, family relations also have negative connotations. But we can still imagine what a healthy family would be like. What does the concept of family teach you about the church and how generations should live together?*

Perspective 3: Am I my brother's keeper?

In the same way that man was commissioned to “tend and keep” his own environment (Gen. 2:15; Hebrew, *schamar*), he is also to be his brother’s “guardian” or “keeper” (Gen. 4:9; *schamar*). In Hebrew, the same word is used in both verses, in one as a verb and in the other as a noun. You shouldn’t have to flee from your “brother,” you should much rather find refuge with him.

- ❓ *Paul characterized the church as a place of encouragement and reassurance, comfort and compassion, love and support—where does this concept thrive in your church?*
- ❓ *What can you do to contribute to that?*

Perspective 4: The church family: a model of success

“People did not convert to Christianity solely because of what the early Christians believed. They converted because of the way in which the early Christians behaved. . . . The ancient Christians were known for their love for one another.”⁶ It was clearly the authentic fellowship that thrived among Christians that was attractive and convincing for the people in the ancient world. The Gospel was not just proclaimed in the church, but also lived out.

- ❓ *What should Christian fellowship be like in order to be convincing for you and for others?*

Perspective 5: Family in the house of God

Through Christ we are all members of the household of God. This is not just a “heavenly” reality. Paul proclaimed that the church is also the “house of God.” However, he wasn’t talking about the building or the location, but rather the fellowship. God dwells where there is peace among brothers and sisters (2 Cor. 13:11) and where people live and act according to the principle of love (Rom. 12:9–21).

- ❓ *How we live as a church has more to do with the house of God than what we do in the church. To what extent is this true?*

- ❓ *The early Christian church family was more a living community than a meeting place. Which is more true of your church?*

Perspective 6: The extended family

As a church, we can live as a family across all generations.

- ❓ *How and where do you experience this in your church?*
- ❓ *What is special about the relationships between brothers and sisters in faith (Philem. 15–16)?*

“ABBA, MY DEAR FATHER”

FOCAL POINT → Romans 8:15–16 / Galatians 4:6

› FOCUS

Jesus surprised His contemporaries by addressing God in a very intimate and childlike way. He not only called him “Father,” but also “Abba”—Daddy (Mark 14:36). But He didn’t do that to emphasize the exclusivity of His relationship with God and claim this form of address only for Himself. He much rather teaches us by His example that we also may understand God and our relationship with Him in this way. Through the Holy Spirit, “Abba” as a form of address ultimately becomes the privilege of all believers and an expression of their status as children of God. The fact that the Holy Spirit helps us to address and understand God in this way makes it clear that God Himself wants us to. He is our loving Father and desires to become your and my “Daddy” once again. Even though we are all marked by a more or less imperfect and perhaps even negative or non-existent relationship with our biological fathers, we can still imagine just how how deep and powerful the bond, affection, calling and strength can be that exist in this understanding of God. For Paul, this was not just the legal entitlement to the future life in the kingdom of God; those who can say “Abba, my dear Father” know that they are also safe in the hands of God in their everyday life.

If God is the Father of all of us, that fact does not just point out that we all originated from Him and belong to Him. In biblical times, the father also defined identity and calling. Children (in particular, sons) usually followed in the footsteps of the father quite naturally and received the family inheritance. Having God as our Father makes brothers and sisters of all of us, whether young or old. Our community of faith and our fellowship with each other in the church must be defined by this fundamental relationship.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *What significance does it have for you personally that you can call God your Father? What does it mean for you and your relationship with God?*
- ❓ *What does the fact that all believers are children of God reveal about our relationship to each other in the church?*

“Stronger than all questions, mysteries and fears is this one word ‘Abba.’ The Father knows.”

Joachim Jeremias⁷

THE CHURCH, THE FAMILY OF JESUS

P2

FOCAL POINT → Mark 3:31–35; 10:28–30

› FOCUS

In the Western world, we live in a society that is characterized by a fundamental individualism and that values individual freedom as the highest good. This has brought much good: ultimately, every individual should be able to determine and shape his or her own life as far as possible. However, no man is an island, and we humans are designed for relationships—which corresponds to the nature of God Himself. The Creator did not design us as solitary creatures that simply hatch out of an egg somewhere, but we are rather (ideally) born into the arms of caring parents and learn to discover and shape life in a family and community: and, ultimately, that is true throughout our entire lives. We get involved with our environment and make our own contribution to our family and society. We take over responsibility and help shape our world, perhaps becoming parents and grandparents ourselves someday. We provide help and support for others, acting with a spirit of solidarity. At the time Jesus lived here on earth, ancient societies were strongly characterized by such a concept of life. The important thing was the collective. Individuals perceived their identity as being rooted in belonging to a nation, to a tribe, and in particular to a family. Indeed, there was no more important or stronger bond than their own family ties.

Because many of the disciples did not follow the life concept laid down by their family legacy, but rather followed Jesus instead, Peter was able to say: “We’ve given up everything to follow you” (Mark 10:28, NLT). What Jesus said in reply makes it clear just what “everything” included, namely brothers and sisters, mother, father, inheritance—in other words: the family. Family is “everything.” But the family of believers is

even more! Jesus says His followers will receive “a hundred times” more brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers (role models, mentors) and inheritance “in this present age” (v. 30, NIV)—not just in heaven! Jesus promises His followers in the “here and now” that they will have the church—His family. He had already made this clear when His mother and brothers had sent for Him (Mark 3:31–35). Everyone in the room would have understood it if Jesus had taken a break in his program at that point. That actually would have been appropriate, because family came first. Instead, Jesus used the situation to teach a very important lesson. He even offended his own mother to make the point: because, for Jesus, true family is not found in ties of blood, but in the ties of faith. You are also part of that family.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❶ What value do the community and the collective body have for you and your faith?
- ❷ How is that demonstrated in your life?
- ❸ What does the concept of family teach you about the church and how generations should live together?

There is probably no more fundamental statement about the church than this: we are the family of Jesus Christ, and we are to lead our lives correspondingly.

AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

P3

FOCAL POINT → Genesis 4:8–10 / Philippians 2:1–5

› FOCUS

The first report in the Bible about a direct consequence of sin, and thus one result of humankind's rejection of its Creator, is not about adultery, stealing or lies, but about a fratricide—about a brother killing his own brother. The story of Abel being slain by his brother Cain is in a certain sense a kind of archetype, a fundamental category of sin. The fundamental biblical concept is that we actually all belong to the same family and have the same father: but, because of sin, man turns against his own brother and therefore also against himself. Brothers become enemies. The family becomes divided, and “every man looks out for himself” becomes the motto. “Am I my brother's keeper?” Cain grimly replied when God asked him about his brother (Genesis 4:9). Our answer to that question should be a decisive “Yes.”

Yes, we are the “keeper” or “guardian” of our brothers and sisters. We are to “pre-serve” each other. These are all ways that the word *schamar* can be translated. In the same way that man was commissioned to “tend and keep” his own environment (Gen. 2:15; *schamar*), he is also to be his brother's “guardian” or “keeper” (Gen. 4:9; *schamar*). In Hebrew, the same word is used in both verses: in one as a verb, and in the other as a noun. We therefore carry a fundamental responsibility for each other and are called to watch over one another in love. This is precisely the point where the teaching of Jesus comes to bear when He admonishes us not to rule over and dominate others, but to serve each other as brothers and sisters (Matt. 23:8–12). Paul proclaimed this understanding in the early Christian church. Life among brothers and sisters in the family of Christ is characterized by mutual encouragement **in Christ**, by

comfort in His love, by fellowship in the Spirit, by hearts that are tender and compassionate, by loving one another and oneness in spirit and purpose, and by the same attitude that Jesus had. No one looks out just for His own interests, but also for the interests of others (Phil. 2:1–5). In particular the church should be a place where we are our brother's “keeper.” Here, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we strive above all to rediscover and revive the fellowship among brothers and sisters that has been lost. Here we take care of each other and watch over each other.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *Encouragement and reassurance, comfort and compassion, love and support—where do you experience that for yourself?*
- ❓ *What can you do to contribute to that?*

The church is not just a gathering place where we hold or participate in religious meetings together. It is first and foremost authentic fellowship lived in the name of Jesus. It's about people, not programs.

THE CHURCH FAMILY: A MODEL OF SUCCESS

P4

FOCAL POINT → Acts 2:41–47

› FOCUS

In his book, *When the Church Was a Family*, Professor Joseph H. Hellerman shows that the early Christian church not only understood itself theologically as the family of God, but also lived as an extended family in a very practical way. In fact, the New Testament church reveals typical family values and structures. For one, the church understood itself primarily as a living community. The brotherly fellowship (*koinonia*) was the main focus. They gathered in private homes (it was only for a short time that the first believers in Jerusalem also went to the temple at the times of prayer). They ate together and shared their food. In many cases, they also shared material goods and property with each other. They read the Scriptures, praised God, talked with each other, prayed for each other, encouraged and supported each other in spiritual and practical matters. They felt bound together emotionally as brothers and sisters (1 Cor. 16:20) and emphasized the unity among themselves despite social, ethnic, generational and gender differences (Gal. 3:26–28; 2 Cor. 13:11–14).

Researchers who study the growth of the early Christian church point to the fact that besides the liberating message of Jesus Christ and personal experiences in contact with Christians in everyday life, it was above all the special brotherly fellowship in the churches that attracted people. That the love lived and experienced in the church is the best evangelistic argument (John 13:35) indeed appears to have been the case in the first few centuries. It was already said of the first church in Jerusalem that it enjoyed the favor and goodwill of all the people because of the fellowship lived out by its members as a result of their faith (Acts 2:47). A Christian church that lives as

the family of God is therefore not just a cuddle group, but one of the most effective evangelistic tools that we believers have in this world, and we can assume that the evangelistic significance of Christian fellowship lived in an authentic and credible way will continue to grow.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

It was clearly the authentic fellowship that thrived among Christians that was attractive and convincing for the people in the ancient world.

❓ What should Christian fellowship be like in order to be convincing for you?

“People did not convert to Christianity solely because of what the early Christians believed. They converted because of the way in which the early Christians behaved. . . . The ancient Christians were known for their love for one another.”

Joseph H. Hellerman⁸

FOCAL POINT → Ephesians 2:11–22

› FOCUS

It's no coincidence that it was Paul who placed so much emphasis on the uniting and unifying power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the church. He himself was transformed by his encounter with Jesus from a zealous proponent of religious Judaism and persecutor of the Christians to the most important missionary to the Gentiles. Like no other, Paul understood that Jews and Gentiles are united in Jesus as brothers and sisters, forming a new family. Through Jesus, we all have access to the Father, and we all are full members of the household of God and therefore part of God's family. What a privilege! But that is not just an individual promise that everyone can claim for him- or herself. This is not just a purely spiritual reality, and Paul makes it clear that this spiritual fact should also become reality in the local church congregation as well.

The dwelling of God is not bound to a certain place or church building, but, rather, God dwells among His people. In using the temple as an illustration, Paul was not concerned with certain forms of worship, ceremonies or practices derived from the temple services, but rather with how those who are "members of God's household," and therefore part of His family, actually live together in His "dwelling."

We are not just a temple of the Holy Spirit as individuals, but rather together we form a dwelling of God in the church.

Just like the church in Ephesus, all churches are to be a "dwelling." It is very important to note that when Paul used the word "temple" he did not mean the temple **ministry**. He used the temple **building** as a symbol for the church. The tabernacle or temple was originally associated with the concept of God's dwelling (Ex. 25:8), and at the end of time the entire New Jerusalem will be the dwelling of God (Rev. 21:3). On the new earth, there will no longer be a temple, because there God Himself will be our temple (Rev. 21:22) and thus our "dwelling." We will all live and dwell together in a new reality. We will not only live in the house of God: God will live among us. This concept of the temple is what Paul was referring to, and in this sense the temple is an illustration of the church. God dwells where there is peace among brothers and sisters (2 Cor. 13:11) and where people live and act according to the principle of love (Rom. 12:9–21).

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *As the church, we are a family living in the house of God. What is important for you in that context?*
- ❓ *The early Christian church family was more a living community than a meeting place. Which of these do you think is more true of your church, and what are the reasons you see it that way?*

THE EXTENDED FAMILY

FOCAL POINT → Philemon 10–20

› FOCUS

This is a touching story. There is slave from the Christian household of Philemon who runs away, only to meet Paul in prison in Rome. This slave Onesimus came to believe in Jesus through Paul. His conversion changed not only his relationship to God, but also to Paul and to Philemon, his former master and owner. Paul viewed Onesimus as his “son.” Paul had played an instrumental role in having “begotten” (v. 10, KJV) this new child of God. In the old and experienced Paul, Onesimus had finally found a spiritual father and mentor. Onesimus became part of the family of God and found in Paul someone who stood unwaveringly on his side (vv. 17–19). Paul interceded on his behalf and helped him to get his life on the right track.

The concept of the extended family is of growing importance in the times and world of today. For many, especially young people, healthy family ties are not part of their normal experience. Too often, steadfast and reliable role models that provide support and guidance are missing: not to mention the fact that it is important for young people in particular to have significant relationships with adults other than their biological parents.

Because, despite his conversion, Onesimus was still a runaway slave. Paul will have encouraged Onesimus to resolve the issue and return to his worldly master. The interesting thing is that Philemon, the legal owner of Onesimus, was himself a Christian and acquainted with Paul. Although Onesimus was still Philemon’s slave on a material level, his conversion fundamentally changed their relationship with each other. Onesimus came back as “a beloved brother” (v. 16). The two were now brothers and part of the family of God. How might this have changed the relationship between the two?

But what the story does make very clear is the fact that the church is an extended family for all people. Whatever their individual backgrounds may be, and wherever they may come from, however old or young they may be, in the church they all find a place of acceptance and belonging among “fathers” and “mothers,” brothers and sisters. In the community of faith, we are there for each other and find help and support—not just in good times.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

As a church, we can live as a family across all generations.

- ❓ How and where do you experience this in your church?
- ❓ What is special about the relationships between brothers and sisters in faith (Philem. 15–16)?

“This concept of the church as ‘the people of God’—as God’s new society, his family, his community—breaks upon many today as the most thrilling ‘good news’ they could ever hear. And what a transformation it can bring when a person knows that he belongs to God and His people for ever! In an age of isolation, the joy of really belonging to God and of being a part of His people . . . is one of the most relevant features of the Christian message of good news.”

David Watson⁹

GROWING TOGETHER

3



“The interplay of generations in celebrating the truth of the Gospel and what God has done is an indispensable element for the survival of the community.”

Howard Vanderwell, quoted in: *The Church of All Ages*, Herndon/Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2008, p. 27.

GROWING TOGETHER

BP

FOCAL POINT → Deuteronomy 29:9–15 / 1 Samuel 17:26–40 / Malachi 4:5, 6 / 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

› MOTIF

The church as the family of God can only be conceived as being intergenerational. This is rooted in the conviction that the different age groups all need each other in order to grow spiritually. Churches that actively seek to involve all generations in their fellowship and mission make it a priority to promote relationships, worship services, religious instruction and learning with and from each other across generational boundaries. It is not enough for different generations to be gathered in the church; rather, they must be consciously connected with each other and actively work together. When striving towards such a goal, believers are guided by the conviction that the different generations are equally important and have equal rights, and that we can all learn from each other—young from old and old from young—in every aspect of life, especially when it comes to our faith.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: All generations are wanted by God

Different generations are a fact of life. However, differences between generations are not just the result of different ages, but also of different cultural influences as well as the spirit of the times and the outlook on life that molded you while you were growing up.

- ❓ *How many different generations can you identify in your church, and what differences between them do you see?*
- ❓ *Do the generations live together harmoniously in your church, or is there rather more tension and conflict?*
- ❓ *In what concrete ways can that be seen?*

Perspective 2: We can only achieve healthy growth when we grow together

In the Old as well as the New Testament, the different generations are fundamentally viewed and addressed together. No one is excluded in any way, neither from religious rituals and celebrations nor from other religious activities of the church. It can be assumed that all generations were also present at the activities of the New Testament house churches.

- ❓ *Can't you just believe for yourself and grow in faith by yourself?*
- ❓ *To what extent can relationships with representatives of the various generations help us to grow in faith?*

Perspective 3: Faith is something we learn from and with each other

Sharing our faith is not a one-way street. Faith is something we learn from and with each other. Jesus in particular makes it clear that adults can also learn from children when it comes to faith. In a healthy church family, the generations all learn from each other, and no particular generation is more important than the others.

- ❓ *Passing on faith is something that happens all the time and involves all church members, whether consciously or unconsciously, positively or negatively. To what extent is that true?*
- ❓ *What can you learn for your faith from the different generations in your church?*

Perspective 4: When the armor doesn't fit

David beat Goliath in its own unique way. The Bible gives us many more examples of how God works through the younger generations in particular to achieve revival and reformation among His people. When we take a closer look, it also becomes clear that the disciples of Jesus were actually younger than we might have thought. If we study the reformations and revivals in history, we also discover that these were usually initiated and carried out by young people. The history of our own church speaks volumes in that respect.

- ❓ *Do we also have certain kinds of “armor” today that we try to stick young people into even though it doesn't really fit?*
- ❓ *People say that older generations tend towards conservation and younger generations tend towards reformation. Is that true?*
- ❓ *Are the initiatives and ideas of the youth in your church more likely to be encouraged or discouraged? Why?*

Perspective 5: Fathers turning to their children and children turning to their fathers

A healthy church family thrives on a loving and supportive relationship between generations. The older generations in particular are called to reach out to the younger ones.

- ❓ *Why should this “turning of hearts” be initiated primarily by the adult generation?*
- ❓ *What can you do to promote mutual understanding and relationships across all generational boundaries?*

Perspective 6: Four growth areas in discipleship

We can learn from the metaphor of the body that we need each other, and that growth in Christ can only happen in fellowship with and with the active involvement of all generations. In order to achieve healthy growth, whether individually or collectively, all generations must work together in the constant awareness of this interdependency. As the body of Christ, the church is to grow in its interpersonal **relationships** (the fellowship among the members), **spiritually** (fellowship with Jesus as the head), and in its **mission** reaching out to the world (active, practical service as a body), as well as in its spiritual gifts and talents (in the edification and **empowerment** of the members and their gifts.)

- ❓ *Which of these four areas of growth would you say are well developed in your church? Which are not?*
- ❓ *In which of these growth areas do you see the particular strengths of the different generations?*

ALL GENERATIONS ARE WANTED BY GOD

P1

FOCAL POINT → **Genesis 5:1–32**

› FOCUS

Not all Bible readers find the fifth chapter of the Bible to be equally interesting. The high ages of the men named there may provoke speculation, but this genealogy is still nowhere near as exciting as the stories that come before and after that chapter. Nevertheless, it documents something very fundamental: Life is designed to generate more life, to bring forth offspring. That's the way God wanted it, at least here on this earth. And, because humans don't usually have their first offspring at the end of their lifetime, there is not just one generation living at one time. We can only speculate about just how this living together of generations worked in these early days of human

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.”

Socrates, Greek philosopher, 5th century BC

history. However, it is obvious that both having offspring and the living together of generations are part of God's plan for us.

The ancient Greeks (see quote) already had their difficulties with the different generations. It has always been typical for older generations to observe the emancipation of the younger generations with apprehension and distrust. Stereotypical attitudes such as: “You know how the youth of today are!” or: “Oh, they're so old-fashioned!” are quickly formed. Although today certain areas of conflict between the generations are less explosive, living together and interacting remain a challenge. Nowadays we find up to six different generations living at the same time, not just because people are living longer, but also because of the fast-paced times and the diverse lifestyles and family concepts. Sociologists develop concepts such as the Lost Generation, the Greatest Generation, the Silent Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y or the Millennials, and find clear, distinguishing characteristics. Even though these may seem somewhat contrived, we also experience in the church how different the generations and their approach to faith and belief can be—and that's a good thing. Isn't it?

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ How many different generations can you identify in your church? What differences do you see between them?
- ❓ Do the generations live together harmoniously in your church, or is there rather more tension and conflict? In what concrete ways can that be seen?

WE CAN ONLY ACHIEVE HEALTHY GROWTH WHEN WE GROW TOGETHER

FOCAL POINT → Genesis 12:1–2 / Deuteronomy 29:9–15

› FOCUS

In a secular society people may argue that faith is a private matter. As long as that is used as a reason to guarantee all people the individual freedom to follow their own faith and beliefs, this statement is correct. But the Bible-based belief in God is anything but a private matter. Having a relationship with God is not something that is lived as an isolated individual, but as part of a community. Conversion and baptism are not a purely individual matter, but usually take place in and through a community. Throughout the whole Bible, we encounter the fact that God not only enters into relationships with individual people, but also to a people as a whole, to **His** people. Even in the very first promise given to Abraham, he was told he would be the father of a great nation of believers. Later, this promise was confirmed by the covenant with Israel, and this covenant extends down to Jesus and to us. Although we sense the great difference between our culture and the language and daily life in Old Testament times, it is still quite impressive to see how God confirmed the covenant with Israel in Deuteronomy 29. To enter the covenant, God does not just have the oldest and most experienced people gather together, but rather all generations from the small children to the aged, and all those who had joined them. He even includes those who have not been born yet. The future children of God are seen as already being part of the family. Therefore, all those who take God and His word seriously can belong to the family, however young they may be, even if they are still being carried in their parents' arms. Indeed, the generations are all viewed and addressed together in both the Old and New Testaments (see for example Josh. 8:34–35; Neh. 8:2–3; 12:43), and no one is excluded in any way, neither from religious rituals and celebrations nor

from other religious activities of the church. It can be assumed that all generations were also present at the activities of the New Testament house churches. After all, our relationship with God is always linked with a relationship with the people of God, or, as it is understood in the New Testament, with the family of God. In faith we **grow** together, and in faith we grow **together**. Fellowship is a vital part of this—not just with those in the same age group and with the same interests, but with all generations.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *Can't you just believe for yourself and grow in faith by yourself? Give reasons for your answer.*
- ❓ *Make a list of people in your church who are important to you, and also note their ages. What significance do they have for your faith?*

*In faith we **grow** together, and in faith we grow **together**.*

FAITH IS SOMETHING WE LEARN FROM AND WITH EACH OTHER

B3

FOCAL POINT → A) Exodus 12:24–27; Deuteronomy 6:6–9; Psalm 78:1–8 // B) Matthew 18:1–5; Mark 10:13–16

› FOCUS

A) The essence of the Christian faith is expressed in the New Testament with the Greek word *pistis*. It can also be translated as “trust.” Faith is not just believing certain things to be true; rather, it means entrusting yourself to God and following Jesus. Faith in God therefore becomes tangible above all in “living truth”—when truth is lived out in practical terms. It is therefore important that faith is passed on in relationships. Ideally, a child “learns” faith from its parents and in the family context by experiencing how faith is lived out. A child experiences how adults lead their lives trusting in God, what they do or do not do, and what their faith is founded on. In the Old Testament, this responsibility for passing on the faith is entrusted to parents, but also to the whole nation of Israel—and therefore also to the church. Triggered by what they have

“How great the diversity manifested in the natural world! Every object has its peculiar sphere of action; yet all are found to be linked together in the great whole. Christ Jesus is in union with the Father, and from the great center this wonderful unity is to extend ... through all classes and diversities of talents.”

Ellen G. White¹⁰

experienced, children will themselves ask to be instructed about it (Ex. 12:26). The actual task of this “instruction” is to tell the story of God’s saving grace (Ex. 13:14) and pass on the Word of God (Deut. 6:6–7). The best place for passing on our faith is not the classroom, but rather everyday life (Deut. 6:7). This means that, essentially, the younger generations learn what faith in God and His word means from role models in faith and from the history and experiences of the older generations in their walk of faith (Ps. 78). Therefore experiencing a living community of faith in the church family is essential in order for faith to be passed on.

B) Passing on our faith is not a one-way street. Jesus makes it clear that adults can also learn from children when it comes to faith. Jesus uses children as an example of the fact that we cannot earn salvation. In a healthy family of faith, children have an equal, if not privileged, status in church life and fellowship (Matt. 18:2–5; Mark 10:14). In a healthy family of faith, all generations learn from each other and no one is more important than the others.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Passing on faith is something that happens all the time and involves all church members, whether consciously or unconsciously, positively or negatively.

❓ *Where have you experienced that already?*

❓ *What have you already learned from the different generations in your church?*

❓ *How can others benefit from your faith?*

WHEN THE ARMOR DOESN'T FIT

FOCAL POINT → 1 Samuel 17:26–40

› FOCUS

This is one of the most well-known stories in the Old Testament: David and Goliath. For many, it is simply a great story about how the little guy can beat the bigger guy, that the underdog can beat the favorite. But the victory in the story doesn't belong to David, but to God. God brought victory for the people of Israel through a teenager. In his youthful enthusiasm and seemingly naive faith, a young kid who had learned to trust in God taught the seasoned men a lesson, despite all their experience. No one had believed he was capable of that. His much older brother even accused him of acting irresponsibly and with dishonorable intentions (v. 28). It's astonishing that this did not dampen the young boy's confidence and motivation, and that he did not go away discouraged. After all, those in the church of God who are older and more experienced supposedly know

everything better and can do everything better. A typical example of this is how Saul stuck the young guy into his own armor: "Okay, if you are bent on doing something for God, then do it our way." The armor represents the combat techniques and traditional way of doing battle of the older generation. This is not wrong and is based on experience. That's what they learned, and that's the way you do it. But just as typical is also the fact that this armor doesn't fit the teenager at all. It is too heavy for him and he is not used to something like that. He prefers to do it his own way. And, to the surprise of all, God gives the venture His blessing! The victory is given by God. There is no giant that is too big for God. But, for David, the armor that Saul tried to stick him in was too big.

If we only rely on what we have always done and always believed, then we might find ourselves stuck in a rut and not getting anywhere—just like the people of Israel back then. Perhaps we as a church today also need this kind of positive dynamism and the faithful courage of young people to experience God's blessing in our church life and mission. Could it be that their perspective and their attitude could take us forward?

The Bible gives us many examples of how God worked through the younger generations in particular to achieve a reformation among His people. The disciples of Jesus were also actually younger than we might have thought. The revivals and reformations in history were usually initiated and sustained by young people. The history of our own church speaks volumes in that respect.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ Do we also have certain kinds of "armor" today that we try to stick young people into even though it doesn't really fit?
- ❓ People say that older generations tend towards conservation and younger generations towards reformation. Is that true?
- ❓ How does your church deal with youthful initiatives and ideas?

FATHERS TURNING TO THEIR CHILDREN AND CHILDREN TURNING TO THEIR FATHERS

P5

FOCAL POINT → Malachi 4:6

› FOCUS

The last verses of the Old Testament refer to a promise that is symbolized by the coming of Elijah. This “Elijah” will help turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers (Malachi 4:5, 6). Some expositors understand this to be a metaphor for general societal care and attention or a return to the faith of the fathers (Luke 1:17). Whatever arguments may speak for any particular interpretation, one thing is clear in this passage: when Jesus came, that marked the beginning of the Messianic age, which is characterized by the generations turning to each other. The role of the heart in the process is given particular emphasis. That makes it clear that this turning is a personal concern of heartfelt importance. It’s about healed relationships and faith between the parent and child generations.

It is certainly no coincidence that this turning of the heart has a certain structure and does not just happen by chance. The fact that the hearts of the fathers are named first is significant. Indeed, it is a fact that, for a healthy and healing relationship between the generations, the turning of the hearts of the adults to the youth must come first. God created life in such a way that the well-being and development of the younger generation is influenced strongly by the loving care and support of the older generation. This also applies for the relationship between the younger children and the youth, not just between adults and children. In order for hearts to turn to each other, someone must take the initiative, and usually the adults are responsible for taking this role in the church. To live according to the motto: “If they want something, they need to come to me” would be the wrong strategy.

Of course, this also applies to the youth in the church. It is always the best policy to take the initiative yourself and reach out to the other side. But because young people are often not the ones in charge, but have new ideas and concerns, it is very important for the older generations in the church to show interest and openness to them. When young people know that they are taken seriously and accepted, their hearts will also be open to the concerns of the older generations. A healthy church family thrives on a loving and supportive relationship between generations. And this is precisely where the Messianic age and the Gospel of Jesus become manifest.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

❓ What can you do to promote mutual understanding and relationships across all generational boundaries?

“Very much has been lost to the cause of truth by a lack of attention to the spiritual needs of the young.”

Ellen G. White

FOUR GROWTH AREAS IN DISCIPLESHIP

P6

FOCAL POINT → **Matthew 28:18–20 / 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 / Ephesians 4:1–6**

› FOCUS

As Jesus showed by His example, “Making disciples” is a question of relationships. Being a disciple of Jesus does not happen in isolation, separated from the fellowship of believers. That is what the illustration of the body of Christ teaches. Paul emphasizes that there is one body, but many members. Christ is the head. We need each other, and growth in Christ can only happen in fellowship with and with the active involvement of all generations. This is true for everyone, old and young, man and woman. In order to achieve healthy growth, whether individually or collectively, all generations

“The results of more than four decades of research point out that intergenerational cooperation has a positive effect on both the elderly and the younger ones involved. . . . The children’s attitudes towards the elderly improve when they spend time with them, and the older people become less negative and happier, with higher self-esteem.”

Holly Catterton Allen und Christine Lawton Ross¹²

must work together in the constant awareness of this interdependency. These two areas of growth in life as followers of Christ cannot be excluded. Following Christ takes place in four elementary and essential areas of growth that apply for all generations.

Relationships: There is no such thing as solo Christianity. Jesus always calls us to enter into His community of fellowship. The better the relationships between the members are, the healthier the body will be.

Spiritual Growth: You remain a disciple as long as you live. In a life of following Jesus, the goal is not to achieve discipleship, but to persevere as a disciple. To achieve growth, we need stimulation and the challenges that the Word of God and the spiritual life in the church confront us with.

Mission: The body is not designed for just sitting around. Both as a church and as individuals, we need the challenges we face in serving and being a witness to the community around us in order to stay spiritually healthy.

Empowerment: As members of the body, we have all been given spiritual gifts and talents. Our task is to discover, develop and use them. Training strengthens the body. We therefore make it our goal to help each other develop our strengths and give each other support in our weaknesses.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ① Which of these four areas of growth are well developed in your church? Which are not?
- ② In which of these areas do you see the particular strengths of the different generations?

“God does not give us a fully formed character. Nor does God form our characters as a sovereign act all alone, or expect us to form our own character unilaterally. The formation of our character in the economy of God is a community event. We aid each other in such formation. God acts on us through others. And, in particular, the working together of the generations is a necessary component of healthy formation. Each age learns from another.”

Howard Vanderwell¹³

CONNECTING

4



May this study encourage you to reach out and establish authentic and loving relationships across generational boundaries and be open to others.

CONNECTING

FOCAL POINT → **Romans 8:38–39 / 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 / Matthew 18:20 / Psalm 8:4–9 / Galatians 1:18 / Hebrews 13:2**

› MOTIF

God is love, and—just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are a relational God—so His church should also reflect this nature. Building healthy relationships is one of the most important and urgent tasks of the Christian church. The love lived out among the followers of Jesus is a central characteristic identifying them as belonging to God. This love makes their faith credible. It is fundamentally impossible to love God and ignore one's fellow human beings. Christian fellowship must be built up and lived out; it is more than the mere gathering of several people in the same place to attend a spiritual program.

Churches that are connecting make conscious efforts to form authentic and loving relationships across generational, cultural and social boundaries and come in contact with people both in and outside the church. They reflect and discuss their concept of God and of humanity, they strive to establish a loving attitude toward their fellow human beings and the world they live in, they appreciate open and honest dialog, and they invest thought and effort in finding ways of showing God's love that are relevant and appropriate for our times.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: God seeks connection

God comes to visit. He seeks our company. He becomes one of us. He allows Himself to be mocked and nailed on the cross: out of His own free will; because it is His desire for you to be able to live with Him again (John 14:2–3). God seeks to have contact with you and your neighbor. For this He has risked everything, given everything. Read the quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Perspective 1 (and its continuation on the SPOTLIGHT page).

- ❓ *What do you think is the difference between “real human beings” and the “ideal human”? Describe a few concrete characteristics.*
- ❓ *What difference does it make if we believe the one or the other concept?*

Perspective 2: God creates connections

Jesus tears down societal and religious barriers. Jesus connects what we humans have separated. Jesus transcends our prejudices and makes being connected with each other the very characteristic that distinguishes His church. For Jesus, we are all part of the same body, and He is the head. Back then, it was the Greeks, slaves and women who were excluded from the church religious life.

- ❓ *Which groups are affected today?*
- ❓ *Where have you experienced these prejudices?*
- ❓ *How do you build bridges to outsiders?*

? *For which groups of people do you find building bridges hard to do?*

Perspective 3: We need to be connected

We live in a highly individualized society: but the Bible describes us humans as social beings. We cannot be followers of Jesus for ourselves alone! We need relationships in order to be human, but also in order to be disciples of Christ.

- ? *How do you find a balance for yourself between personal and common happiness?*
- ? *When do you hold back your own wishes for the benefit of others?*
- ? *When do you fight for your own happiness?*
- ? *Read the quote in Perspective 3. What do you think of the theory that we either grow together or don't grow at all?*

Perspective 4: An attitude that connects

Despite his negative experiences, David apparently held on to his fundamentally positive view of human nature (Ps. 8:3–9). Jesus Himself was sensitive to being impressed by otherwise unimpressive people (such as children, unbelievers or prostitutes).

- ? *Reflect on your conception of human nature. Do you tend to expect positive or negative things from your fellow human beings?*
- ? *Why is that so?*

Perspective 5: A dialog that connects

Paul and Peter were both very influential leaders in the New Testament church. They both wrote letters that were taken up in the biblical canon. Both were strong personalities. And yet they did not let their conflicting beliefs cause them to doubt the divine calling of the other. That was apparently made possible through *historeo*, the sharing with each other of one's own biography and experiences with God.

? *Where is there room for *historeo* in the life of your church?*

Perspective 6: A gesture that connects

For the people in the times of both the Old and the New Testament, it was a natural custom to show hospitality to others. Jesus even considered it to be serving God Himself (Matt. 25:34–46). Could it be that hospitality is a spiritual discipline that we should exercise more?

- ? *What gives you the feeling of being welcome?*
- ? *What can you do to help people feel welcome in your church?*

GOD SEEKS CONNECTION

P1

FOCAL POINT → **Genesis 3:8–9 / Matthew 1:23 / Romans 8:38–39 / John 14:2–3 / Revelation 21:1–3**

› Focus

It's a simple, but perhaps the most important, message that God would like to communicate to you: "God loves you!" And me, too. And your neighbors, the cashier at the supermarket at the corner, the meter maid, the asylum seeker, the politician. God loves every one of us, and He wants to be close to those He loves. This fact is a common thread running through the entire Bible: God created humankind and gave them the task of populating the earth (Gen. 1:26–28).

Fellowship and interaction are so important to God that he instituted a "day of fellowship" on the seventh day of creation (Gen. 2:2–3). From the very beginning, God came to visit (Gen. 3:8–9). And even when we humans felt that we didn't need God, God didn't give up, and found a way to heal the breach (Gen. 3:15).

During the great desert wandering, God pitched a tent of His own in order to be near to His people (Ex. 25:8). He suffered when His people chose to take a bad path, and sent prophets time and again to motivate them to change their ways. And then, when the fullness of time came, the Creator Himself became one of His creatures: an outcast; asylum seeker; carpenter—ostracized; mocked; betrayed; deserted; executed cruelly. And yet He consciously chose to take this path, because He wants us to live with Him again one day (John 14:2–3; Rev. 21:1–23). God loves us immeasurably, and He is seeking contact with us: with you and with your neighbor. The Bible leaves no doubt of this. For He has risked everything; given everything.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Read the quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer below (and its continuation on the SPOTLIGHT page).

- ❓ What do you think is the difference between "real human beings" and the "ideal human"? Write down five characteristics for each.
- ❓ What difference does it make if we believe the one or the other concept?

"Ecce homo!—Behold the God who has become man, the unfathomable mystery of the love of God for the world. God loves man [human beings]. God loves the world. It is not an ideal man that He loves, but man as he is; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find abominable in man's opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, the real man, the real world, this is for God the ground for unfathomable love, and it is with this that He unites Himself utterly. God becomes man, real man."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹⁴

GOD CREATES CONNECTIONS

FOCAL POINT → Galatians 3:26–29 / 1 Corinthians 12:12–13

› FOCUS

“So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28, GNT) We can only guess how these words would have sounded to the ears of the listeners back then, because the social differences were very marked. The Jews had misgivings about non-Jews. That’s why Peter and the church members were so astonished when God poured out the Holy Spirit on non-Jews (Acts 10:45).

“Being born again also defines that new family. The new birth guarantees a new worldview, a new view across artificial borders that we set up; it announces a more profound following and affection. For those of the kingdoms of this world who give Him their allegiance, Jesus preaches a joyous message: repent and be reborn; behold the Kingdom of God, and find a new identity. It is not a collection of political proposals for the world; it is about the proclamation and embodiment of the alternative to that.”

Shane Claiborne und Chris Haw¹⁵

Slavery was legitimized by society, and women were viewed as being the possession of the men.

And then Paul wrote: “So there is no difference ... you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.” What Paul was saying here was scandalous: because it means that Jesus tears down societal, cultural and religious barriers. Jesus connects what we humans have separated. Jesus transcends our prejudices and even makes being connected with each other **the** decisive characteristic that distinguishes His church (John 13:34–35).

Those who want to follow Jesus must accept that they are not alone on that path. We all belong to the same body, and He is the head (1 Cor. 12:12–27). Personal and societal prejudices are simply abolished by Jesus.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Back then, it was the Greeks, slaves and women who were excluded from the church religious life.

- ❓ Which groups are affected today?
- ❓ Where have you experienced these prejudices?
- ❓ How do you build bridges to outsiders?
- ❓ For which groups of people do you find it hard to do?

WE NEED TO BE CONNECTED

P3

FOCAL POINT → **Genesis 2:15–23 / 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 / Romans 12:4–5 / Matthew 18:20**

› FOCUS

Do you also have to smile when you read Genesis 2:15–23? God planted a garden and entrusts it to the care of a man. But then He steps back and notices something: “It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him” (Gen. 2:18, GNT). The next thing He does is to create the animals. The man has the privilege giving them their names. But then the story of creation briefly notes a simple fact: “But not one of them was a suitable companion to help him” (Gen. 2:20, GNT). Only now does God form a woman out of Adam’s rib, and Adam is happy. Finally!

“Long-term interpersonal relationships are critical for real progress in life as a Christian. The one who remains, grows. The one who leaves does not grow. . . . The one who tries to escape due to the difficult task of conflict resolution is very vulnerable to repeat the same cycle of dysfunctional relationship with another person in another community elsewhere in the city. It’s a simple but profound biblical reality that we share, grow and thrive, or we almost do not grow at all.”

Joseph H. Hellerman¹⁶

The theological lesson drawn this wonderful story: humankind was created to live in relationships. We need someone other than just ourselves: a counterpart; specifically a partner, but apparently that’s also not enough.

In the New Testament, Jesus and Paul make it clear that faith is not just a private, individual issue. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus promises that He will be there when two or three people come together in His name. This is not a big group, but it’s also not just one individual. And Paul later used the illustration of the body of Christ in order to make it clear that following Jesus is a joint venture in which each individual is important (1 Cor. 12:27). Apparently, we have been created by God as social beings, and as such I can’t be a follower of Jesus just for myself alone. I need fellowship in order to be human, but also in order to be a Christian. At least that’s what we find in the Bible. What a contrast to an individualized society where individual and personal happiness seems to be what is valued most.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *How do you find a balance for yourself between personal and common happiness?*
- ❓ *When do you hold back your own wishes for the benefit of others?*
- ❓ *When do you fight for your own happiness?*
- ❓ *Read the quote here. What do you think of the theory that we either grow together or don’t grow at all?*

AN ATTITUDE THAT CONNECTS

FOCAL POINT → Psalm 8:4–9

› FOCUS

You could hardly write something more positive about human beings than David did: “Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5, NLT). That’s a hymn singing the praises of human beings that comes from the pen of someone who had spent a long time living as a fugitive; someone who was chased around his country, hunted unjustly by his own king. David experienced first-hand how power can change a person. David had every reason to be pessimistic about other people, but apparently he was able to preserve his fundamentally positive view of human nature.

It seems to be a general principle that people tend to live up to what the important people in their lives expect of them; therefore, nurturing a fundamental attitude towards our fellow human beings that assumes they are good, even if they don’t always

live up to it, may actually be the best thing we can do to help bring healing to the world. The American pastor and theologian Rob Bell quoted the following theory: “... if people were taught more about who they are, they wouldn’t have to be told what to do.”¹⁷ Could that be right?

In any case, Jesus definitely had this positive attitude towards His fellow human beings. He mingled so much with the outcasts of society that He was accused of surrounding Himself with “scum” (cf. Mark 2:13–17, NLT). The New Testament only speaks twice of extraordinary faith. Both times, Jesus discovered it among the supposed unbelievers (Matt. 8:10; 15:28). And, although the people were of the opinion that there was nothing they could learn from children, Jesus declared them to be examples in terms of faith (Matt. 18:1–6; 21:15–16; Mark 10:13–16). John Ortberg puts it in a nutshell: “One of the most impressive aspects of Jesus is how he was impressed by unimpressive people.”¹⁸

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ Reflect on your conception of human nature. Do you tend to expect positive or negative things from your fellow human beings?
- ❓ Why is that so?
- ❓ Write down Psalm 8:5 on a piece of paper, position it where it will always catch your attention, and embark on the adventure to discover the “honor” and “glory” in your fellow human beings!

*“When other people look at us kindly, we come alive.
If others acknowledge us in our own way, we will become
free. And where we feel accepted and affirmed, we become
happy.”*

Jürgen Moltmann¹⁹

FOCAL POINT → Galatians 1:11–23; 2:1–21

› FOCUS

Peter and Paul are two apostles who could not be more different. Both have firm convictions. Both are committed. Both sacrifice their lives for Jesus and the good news. And yet they do not really get along very well with each other (see Gal. 2). Their theology and mission strategy are different.

And yet these two leaders are still able to acknowledge and respect each other (Gal. 2:7). Perhaps we find the secret of their faith described in Galatians 1:18. There it says that Paul traveled to Jerusalem to **get acquainted** with Peter (NIV). The underlying word in the Greek text is *historeo*, which means sharing one's life history with each other. The two of them took the time to spend 15 days of *historeo* with each other. They shared their biographies and experiences with God, maybe even their weaknesses and deepest desires with each other. It was such an intense experience that, afterwards, neither of them had any doubts that the other was an apostle called by God, not even when a serious theological conflict arose.

What the two of them could only imagine has been proven by history: Each of them, both Paul and Peter, was extremely important for the spreading of the Gospel—not **despite**, but indeed **because** of, their differences.

If we want to be a church that is connected and connecting, then we must recognize the importance of biographies, both our own and those of our guests, and create room for *historeo*.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

❓ Good questions can be very helpful for facilitating *historeo*. In the appendix you will find such questions. Make use of them: imagine you come from Mars, and choose a person from church with whom you would like to embark on the adventure of *historeo*.

“Imagine you are from Mars. You come to visit this world and everything is strange and new. But that doesn’t scare you. On the contrary: it makes you incredibly curious and eager to learn. Unfortunately, you know nothing about the customs of this world, but you want to understand them. So you ask: without prejudices; without hypotheses; without judgments. But much rather with interest, sometimes with amazement, sometimes with amusement. And always with goodwill and willingness to engage in an open process of understanding in which you will also learn something new.”

Tobias Faix and Anke Wiedekind²⁰

A GESTURE THAT CONNECTS

FOCAL POINT → Hebrews 13:2 / Matthew 25:34–40 / Psalm 23:5–6

› FOCUS

Hospitality was a natural custom in the life of the Old Testament patriarchs (Gen. 18:1–8; 19:1–3), even if it meant making a considerable sacrifice. Hospitality was firmly anchored in the laws of Israel (Lev. 19:34). It is inconceivable that the New Testament church could have existed without hospitality, because almost all the activities of the early Christian church took place in private houses (see for example Acts 2:44–47). And, for Jesus, showing hospitality is nothing other than serving God Himself (Matt. 25:34–40; compare Heb. 13:2). Hospitality, or love for strangers (that is the literal translation of the Greek term *philoxenia*), is therefore an integral part of the Christian lifestyle, and it is nourished by the conviction that God is a hospitable God (Ps. 23:5–6), that we are all only guests and strangers on earth, and that all our possessions and everything we have comes from God and God alone (Lev. 19:34; Heb. 11:13).

Seen in this way, hospitality is perhaps one of the most challenging spiritual exercises; it demands of us time, money and respect for the differentness of strangers. But this is the only way strangers can become friends.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What gives you the feeling of being welcome?
- ❓ What can you do to help people feel welcome in your church?
- ❓ Deliberately invite someone you don't know very well to visit you at home.

“Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!”

Hebrews 13:2 (NLT)

“While we are trying to grow out beyond our manhood, to leave the man behind us, God becomes man and we have to recognize that God wishes us men, too, to be real men. While we are distinguishing the pious from the ungodly, the good from the wicked, the noble from the mean, God makes no distinction at all in His love for the real man. He does not permit us to classify men and the world according to our own standards and to set ourselves up as judges over them. He leads us ad absurdum by Himself becoming a real man and a companion of sinners and thereby compelling us to become the judges of God. God sides with the real man and with the real world against all their accusers. Together with men and with the world He comes before the judges, so that the judges are now made the accused.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer²¹

CARING

5



May this study encourage you to reach out to others with love and compassion and accept them the way they are. Get involved in helping and supporting others where you can, and don't be too proud to ask for help when you need it yourself.

CARING

BP

FOCAL POINT → Romans 14:17 / Mark 12:31 / John 13:35

› MOTIF

Showing active, genuine care for one another meets most of our basic needs as humans and creates close fellowship in the church community. Every human being has certain basic needs. Among many others, these include the need for belonging, autonomy, appreciation, communication, being needed, close relationships, and orientation. In a church community, many of these basic needs can at least be partly fulfilled by genuine care for one another; this helps contribute to the general well-being and satisfaction of the members.

In this sense, all members of a church community, young and old, are called upon to be sensitive to the needs of the others and actively care for each other. Of course, just voicing such a call is not enough. The decisive factor is the willingness to question our own behavior and to let ourselves become inspired and motivated. There are things that can help us become more active, genuine caregivers.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: “Seeing” others

There can be an enormous difference between noticing others and “seeing” them. There are some people who are seen and yet not noticed. Jesus teaches us that genuine care for each other begins with really “seeing” each other.

❓ *In what way do you feel that your church notices and really sees you?*

Perspective 2: Genuine listening

It is not always easy to find out the needs of another person. However, genuine care involves knowing what the other person needs. One prerequisite for this is, above all, really listening to her or him. We find texts in the Bible that make this very clear.

❓ *What does genuine listening mean to you?*

Perspective 3: Accepting others

Jesus knew what the people He met really needed, and He always showed loving acceptance, no matter what a person had done. There are many examples in the Bible that illustrate this. This kind of acceptance—and not a judgmental attitude—is also essential for a genuinely caring community.

❓ *Try to describe what acceptance feels or looks like.*

❓ *Where can you see that in your church?*

Perspective 4: Accepting people who are unappealing

Being genuinely caring must also include the people we might not find appealing. We cannot assume that someone else will take care of them. Making it our concern to genuinely care for someone and feeling a deep love for someone are two completely different things. However, they both require an inner attitude of acceptance toward the other person—particularly when we don’t find him or her very appealing.

❓ *Try to define for yourself what the difference between care and love is.*

Perspective 5: Practical care

There is often a need for practical care in the church community. In such cases, it's not enough just to listen and talk, but rather hands-on help is required. In a church where this is practiced, young and old will form a close community of fellowship and interact harmoniously.

❓ *Have you personally experienced your church actively taking care of you?*

❓ *Can you describe this care?*

Perspective 6: Intercessory prayer

Intercessory prayer is powerful. Sometimes it is not possible to get actively involved in practical care—and then intercessory prayer is very important. It demonstrates genuine care and brings all troubles and needs before God, to the One who is the Master Caregiver.

❓ *How do you feel when others pray for you?*

All members of a church community, young and old, are called upon to be sensitive to the needs of the others and actively care for each other.

TO BE CARING MEANS “SEEING” OTHERS

P1

FOCAL POINT → Luke 24:13–15

› FOCUS

If I really want to “see” the others in my church, then it is not enough just to observe them optically and take note of them. Sometimes we can describe things very precisely, such as the clothing someone was wearing, how he took his seat, or something annoying that he said, but yet know only little about who he really is and what he thinks or feels. But I can only genuinely care for others if I actually know who I am dealing with. I must deliberately and consciously “see” them.

This “really seeing” others is also something we can learn from Jesus. When He encountered the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it was not enough for Him just to look at and respond to them. Although Jesus as the Son of God knew exactly who He was dealing with, although He indeed could already “see” them, He gave them the feeling that they were important to Him. He walked along with them and let them talk without interrupting them. He took their concerns seriously and took time to accompany them.

This is the only way we can really “see” others. Don’t judge too quickly, don’t just observe, but much rather accompany and listen. This does, however, require us to invest time and attention, more than just a fleeting “How are you?”

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *Have you ever really been “seen” in this way?*
- ❓ *What did it feel like?*
- ❓ *What was it that made you feel like you were really being seen?*
- ❓ *Ask the question “How are you?” wholeheartedly. Expect an answer and take time to listen. You can take the first step now: choose someone from your church that you want to really “see” next Sabbath (or sooner!). Take time to do this.*

“As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them.”

Luke 24:15 (NIV)

TO BE CARING MEANS REALLY LISTENING

P2

FOCAL POINT → Ecclesiastes 3:7 / Proverbs 29:20 / Psalm 34:14

› FOCUS

Let's assume that you have resolved to really "see" someone and are making time for him. And right there you already come up against the first hurdle. The person wants to tell you something, and you are supposed to listen. But what applies for really "seeing" others is also true for listening: to listen means more than just listening.

You've probably experienced often enough what it's like when you are talking with someone and can't help feeling like he's not really listening. Eventually you stop talking and "bottle up." Usually, the other person doesn't even notice and goes on talking about himself. That kind of listening has nothing to do with being caring. Indeed, it is actually counterproductive, because the other person can tell that you are not really interested in him. Really listening is not easy and is something that must be learned.

The Bible is very explicit on this subject and talks about the fact that talking is not the decisive factor. Listening is often much more important. Only those who can listen will notice when others begin to open themselves up.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ② *Learn more about the technique of "active listening," which helps you to give people the assurance that you are really listening and understand them.*

- ① *Try to listen to someone today without quickly adding your comments or giving your opinion. Let them finish saying what they want to say.*
- ② *Restate what you heard and then ask if you have understood it correctly. Really listening is something you can practice and learn to do better!*

*To listen means more than just listening. **Active listening** is done verbally and non-verbally. Here are some tips:*

Verbal

Restate what you heard.

Ask if you have understood correctly.

Clarify what you did not understand.

Use affirmative interjections such as "aha," "okay," "I see," "yes" etc.

Nonverbal

Really look at the other person.

Turn to physically face the other person.

Use affirmative gestures and facial expressions such as nodding your head.

TO BE CARING MEANS ACCEPTING OTHERS

P3

FOCAL POINT → 1 John 4:21

› FOCUS

At the last supper with His disciples, Jesus knew exactly who would betray Him, but He didn't unmask and expose him in front of the other eleven. He only made a matter-of-fact statement, but didn't condemn Judas or reproach him. Jesus even washed his feet. Acceptance always conveys the assurance that one will not be condemned, but rather accepted as a brother, no matter what has happened or will happen.

Have you also experienced something like the following? Another person has really listened to you and you know that he has understood you and your problem. But then he pulls out the hammer. He tells you very clearly that the way you see and do things is wrong and that you have to change—and says it in a way that makes it clear that he will not accept you as long as you stay the way you are. It's not about your actions or thinking—which you might already have concluded are wrong by yourself—but you realize he means you as a person. In his eyes, you as a person are not good enough; there is something wrong with you. And hearing his words makes you feel that way, too.

What happens then? In a situation like that, you also withdraw inwardly and bottle up. The idea of caring for each other is snuffed out. Jesus is different. He always lovingly accepts sinners. He doesn't condemn, but rather creates an atmosphere where people can recognize things for themselves.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Think about why acceptance is so important.

- ❓ *Can you distinguish between the sins, mistakes or weaknesses of a person and the person himself?*
- ❓ *Why is that often so difficult?*
- ❓ *Observe your choice of words. Are you judging the person or his behavior?*
- ❓ *When you are talking about the person, do you talk about him as a person or about his behavior?*

Open your heart for others. God will help you if you ask Him to. But first make sure you are ready and willing to put it into practice!

TO BE CARING IS A DECISION OF LOVE

P4

FOCAL POINT → Matthew 5:44–48

› FOCUS

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that we should love one another so that everyone will know that we are His disciples (John 13:34–35). On another occasion He put it even more strongly: “But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:44–45, NLT). As if it were that easy! There is someone in the church who’s just not my kind of person—yes, I simply don’t like them. Am I really supposed to love them? Is that even possible? Not to mention people outside the church ...

Love does not always mean the same thing. Nowhere does Jesus say that we must love all people equally. However, He does expect us to accept other people and take care of them when they have problems. We can love our friends, husband, wife, children and all those who are dear to us in a different way than those to whom we do not have such a close inner connection. Not only is that quite human, but it is also anchored in human nature, as God has created us.

Nevertheless, those whom we may not like as much as others also need attention, intercessory prayer and care. They should also be listened to, and they can also be accepted as children of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ, so that their needs—for example, concerning church activities—will also be seen and fulfilled. That is certainly something we cannot manage alone—we need the help of Jesus. It is important for us to examine our behavior in this respect, and above all to talk to Jesus about what we discover.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ① *Reflect upon the feelings you have concerning your brothers and sisters in the church.*
- ① *Can you really accept them as fellow children of God for whom you can pray, and be there to help when they need it?*
- ① *Be honest with yourself and talk to God about it.*

*Love does not always mean
the same thing!*

TO BE CARING MEANS PROVIDING

P5

FOCAL POINT → James 2:14–17

› FOCUS

We are all familiar with the parable of the good Samaritan. There is this man who has been attacked by robbers. He needs practical and immediate help, otherwise he will die. It would be of no help to talk with him about his misfortune and suffering. The Samaritan, a stranger, comes along and helps him. All those who actually should have been the ones to help him, the people from his own church, just pass him by ...

Jesus told this parable to show that everyone who needs help needs to be taken care of—by us. Just talking doesn't help anyone: deeds are what's called for. In everyday life, immediate, practical care is often needed. The text in James states it even more dramatically. It says that someone who only talks about caring for someone and about charity, but doesn't act upon it, has not understood anything about the Christian faith (James 2:14–17).

Perhaps there is someone in the church who needs help moving—are we there to lend a hand? Perhaps there is someone who needs a shuttle service so they can come to church—who will give her a ride? Perhaps there is a teenager who needs tutoring in math and grammar—will anyone take it upon himself? Perhaps there is someone who is sick—who will visit him?

But, in order to manage all this, all the other things we talked about previously in this chapter must come first: to begin with, we must really “see” the others, listen to them

and accept them—only then will we be able to find out where someone needs care and help. And then this is put into practice.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ Consider: where might someone need your concrete caring? Where is a situation in which action is needed, and not just a discussion about what to do?
- ❓ How can the practical care in your church be improved?
- ❓ What can you do to contribute to that?
- ❓ Can and must practical care extend beyond the church itself?

“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions?”

James 2:14 (NLT)

TO BE CARING MEANS TO INTERCEDE IN PRAYER

P6

FOCAL POINT → 2 Corinthians 1:11 / 1 Timothy 2:1

› FOCUS

We find the call to intercessory prayer again and again in the New Testament. Intercessory prayer is powerful. “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them” (1 Tim. 2:1, NLT). When we listen to others in the church, we often hear about things that make us feel helpless and discouraged. For example, what can you do when someone is terminally ill? There is nothing we can do about that—we can only be there and keep listening. And there is one thing that we can always do: we can pray.

It can be very practical to make a prayer list for each day. Otherwise, things can very easily be forgotten. You can and should let those you are praying for know that you are doing it. That will encourage them, and will give them the feeling that they are accepted and the assurance that their concerns are also being brought before God by others. This in turn can help them to open up and talk about it. Intercessory prayer is an expression of care and sympathy, and also changes the one who prays. He himself will find an inner connection to and understanding of the person for whom he is praying.

This is an area where the older church members in particular have a great field of responsibility. Those who can no longer provide practical help and care can always pray. And prayer is very powerful! Every young person in our churches should have many who are praying for them, who accompany them in this way along their journey in faith and in life.

Ellen White said: “In visions of the night, representations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God’s people. Many were praising God. The sick were healed, and other miracles were wrought. A spirit of intercession was seen, even as was manifested before the great Day of Pentecost.”²²

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ Who needs your intercessory prayer in your church?
- ❓ Who is having problems? Who is sick?
- ❓ Start today and pray specifically for one person in your church for whom you have not prayed before, and observe how your attitude towards this person changes over the next few weeks.

Intercessory prayer changes my own attitudes and feelings toward the people for whom I pray.

It helps me develop an inner connection to them, and they feel valued and accepted.

*“You often look at something a hundred times, a thousand times,
before you really see it for the first time.”*

Christian Morgenstern, German poet, 1871–1914

→ *Read this thought a few times and talk with God about your desire
to learn to really see others when you encounter them.*

PARTICIPATING

6



May this study encourage you to recognize the spiritual gifts and talents of your fellow human beings, and to get actively involved where there are opportunities for you to make a contribution.

PARTICIPATING

FOCAL POINT → 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

› MOTIF

Building up a church together strengthens the sense of community and helps all who are involved identify themselves fully with the church and its mission. Working together makes you stronger. What is true for politics and business is also of great importance for the church. God has given each individual specific spiritual gifts and talents that complement those of all the others in the church. Working together constructively is not just important because it makes the church strong and helps it move forward; it also creates a high level of identification with the church among all who are involved: “I belong here, I am needed here, I am a part of it all!” The youth (and children) in our churches should be just as involved in building up the church with their spiritual gifts and talents as all the others.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: God has given each individual a spiritual gift

There is no one in the church whom God has not given a spiritual gift. God hasn’t forgotten anyone, although some may sometimes think so. Each individual has the task of discovering these gifts. Only then can they be utilized.

❓ *How would you describe your personal spiritual gifts?*

Perspective 2: To have a spiritual gift means you have a calling

Participating in the building up of the church means that every individual is welcome to get involved. Not only can each spiritual gift be used in some way to help build up the church, but each spiritual gift is also urgently needed for that task. That means daring to go beyond your own comfort zone! In order to do so, we must respect and really get to know ourselves and others so that we can recognize our own spiritual gifts and the gifts others have been given.

❓ *How could your spiritual gifts be used in the church?*

❓ *And how are they already being used?*

Perspective 3: Together we are strong

Unity is strength. This is true for almost all areas of society. Jesus knows that His children are also strong when they all work together and have a common goal. He has equipped us for just that.

❓ *What could help you, together with your sisters and brothers in the church, to feel strong, both in church and in your private lives?*

Perspective 4: No person is more important than another

It is particularly important to keep in mind that this also applies to young people. They are filled with ideas, opinions and energy, but too often they are not given opportunities to apply these in the church. They are often considered to be too inexperienced or unimportant.

- ❓ *What things are done by youth in your church, and in what areas are they asked for their advice?*

Perspective 5: How we can work together

Every Christian knows that all of us, young and old, should work together in the church. The problem is not the theory: it's the practical implementation that's difficult. That's something that needs a lot of careful consideration.

- ❓ *How could your experience help you make a contribution in this?*

Perspective 6: Dealing with conflicts

Conflicts are a normal part of life. That also applies to the church. The more we get involved with each other, the easier it is for conflicts to arise. Each of us is different, so there will always be plenty of friction. But it will always be possible to find a peaceful solution.

- ❓ *How have you experienced conflicts in the church, and above all how have they been resolved?*

Building up a church together strengthens the sense of community and helps all who are involved identify themselves fully with the church and its mission.

GOD HAS GIVEN EACH INDIVIDUAL A SPIRITUAL GIFT

P1

FOCAL POINT → 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

› FOCUS

God gives everyone spiritual gifts and talents. There is no one who has not been given a spiritual gift. Gifts and talents are to be used both in our private lives and in the context of the church. The church is dependent on the diversity of the gifts among its members. These need to be discovered, acknowledged and appreciated by establishing an environment in which each individual is welcome to get involved and by creating opportunities for where anyone can take over responsibility for shaping the project.

The diversity of gifts includes spiritual gifts as well as natural talents and learned skills that can and should be used outside of church services. The range of possible applications is extremely diverse: spiritual guidance and counseling, hospitality, kindness, social and welfare work, working with children—to only name a few gifts. Beyond that, gifts are usually things that you enjoy doing.

Is this something you can relate to? Even if you already know what gifts you have, you also need to have an encouraging group of supporters and the church as a field for experimentation. There are many church members who doubt themselves and their abilities, are insecure in this respect and have little self-confidence. The church should therefore encourage and help its members to discover and apply their own individual gifts. A test for assessing spiritual gifts could be helpful and the results surprisingly clear-cut. Ask your pastor about the possibility of doing this in your church.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ? What are your spiritual gifts and talents? Write them down, and be as concrete and detailed as possible. Talk about your gifts this week with a person you trust outside of your family. Then also ask your family members which abilities they see in you. Compare with and update your notes. Be open to seeing yourself with the eyes of the others. Take your notes with you to church on Sabbath.
- ? What would you enjoy doing for God?
- ? What might be some obstacles keeping you from getting actively involved?
- ? How can you encourage other church members to discover and recognize their gifts?

God equips each individual with spiritual gifts and talents and expects each of us to put them to work for the good of all.

TO HAVE A SPIRITUAL GIFT MEANS YOU HAVE A CALLING

P2

FOCAL POINT → Haggai 1:3–9

› FOCUS

The prophet Haggai lived at the time when the temple in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians, was being rebuilt. He criticized the fact that the people were too concerned with themselves and maintaining their own standard of living, and that they didn't care about rebuilding the temple. He told them this in very plain language. What would he say to us today if he saw the situation in our church?

Imagine the following situation. Perhaps there's someone in the church who found out a long time ago what his gifts are and admits that openly. And yet it could be that he doubts the gifts would be useful for the church, sets other priorities, or simply has no time for the church. It could be that more people in the church think like this than you might believe. The result: the gifts and the needs are there—but no one gets involved; and there is actually no good reason not to. On the one hand, the problem in this situation could be that the existing gifts are not viewed objectively. Many may think they are too trivial or of little value. We often hear people say: "What difference would that make for the church?" or, "I'm not good enough at doing that." What is needed in this case is simply that we get to know each other and clearly show each other how much each of us and each of our gifts is needed in the church.

On the other hand, the problem could be that we are all content just to sit back and relax in our comfort zone. It is often very hard to leave that zone—it requires quite an effort, and that is inconvenient. However, each of us can be very certain that we are needed, just as each organ in the body has its distinctive function—this metaphor is used in the Bible for a very good reason.

No one is superfluous. No young person, no older person. The Bible emphasizes this and describes it very clearly. Therefore, recognizing the gift is not the only decisive factor, but also whether the gift is even used at all, and how it is used to build up the church. Participating in the building up of the church means getting involved and working for the good of others. This is our personal responsibility, for which each of us alone is accountable before God.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❶ *Where can you find yourself in this biblical text?*
- ❷ *What or who could help you to leave your comfort zone?*
- ❸ *Do you know any younger or older people in your church who are lacking the courage to use their gifts in the church, although they already know exactly what gifts they have?*
- ❹ *However, think above all about yourself this week! How do you feel about your gifts and putting them into practice?*

"But everything that is done must strengthen all of you."

1 Corinthians 14:26 (NLT)

TOGETHER WE ARE STRONG

P3

FOCAL POINT → Acts 5:12; 2:42

› FOCUS

In Acts 5:12 we read that the whole church met regularly in the temple, united closely in faith. They were a closely bound community. They fellowshiped with each other. They identified themselves with their church. Can you imagine that? What a great power must have radiated from this church! This could not remain unnoticed by those around them.

The same is true today: when everyone works together with each person using his or her gifts to build up the church, it helps create a strong sense of identification with the church for all who are involved. We all carry the responsibility; that means all of us together—it is our church. Together we are strong! As citizens of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) began to gather together for non-violent demonstrations, which marked the beginning of a great movement that first worked to change the GDR and then toward the reunification of the two German states, they became strong. Among other things, it ultimately led to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Things work in a similar way in the church. What difference can one person alone make? As a community, together with others, we are stronger. When everyone works together, it creates opportunities that one person alone would never have.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *What goal does your church have?*
- ❓ *Has it even set a goal? Has the goal actually been defined?*
- ❓ *Does everyone know what the goal is?*
- ❓ *Is everyone involved in working towards this goal? Are young and old united in this effort? Is everyone making a contribution with her or his gifts?*
- ❓ *Is a lasting sense of identification with the church being fostered in this way?*
- ❓ *Is this helping to create a strong community of fellowship where the blessings of God can be seen and felt? Or is your church just a gathering of individuals concerned with their own edification and their own needs?*
- ❓ *Talk with other members of your church about the concept of “identification with the church.” How strong is your own sense of identification with your church?*

Alone we are weak—
in a community of fellowship with
other believers, we are strong!

NO PERSON IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANOTHER

P4

FOCAL POINT → 1 Corinthians 3:8 / Matthew 18:3

› FOCUS

How about how the value of people is seen in your church? Are there perhaps some people who seem to be more valuable than others and are therefore given more attention and consideration? Or vice versa?

We will mention only one aspect of this issue here: there are children and youth in the church. Are they really being seen and given appropriate attention and consideration? Until recently, our young people were only seen as really belonging to the church and given a voice when they had reached the status of a mature adult and had been baptized. They were there, were allowed to recite memory verses and collect the offerings, but otherwise they were supposed to just sit still.

For God, however, children and youth are just as important as all the others. He wants all of us to be saved. Jesus died for all of us. The faith of a child or youth should not be valued differently than that of a fifty-year-old. We are all members of equal value in the church family. We all have the privilege of fully belonging and participating. Jesus even points to children as examples for adults!

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *How does your church measure up in this area?*
- ❓ *Are there parts of the worship service when all are involved and can make a contribution together?*
- ❓ *Are there any aspects that are appealing to the style and interests of your young people? Do you listen to them and their needs?*
- ❓ *Or is, for example, the church service only geared toward the adults, and if anything the children just get a token story before the sermon?*
- ❓ *What do you think about the importance and value of the people in the church?*
- ❓ *Does actual practice reveal that everyone is given the same consideration, no matter what their needs are? In particular, when it comes to worship service style and involvement? Reconsider your perspective and standards.*

“The one who plants is just as important as the one who waters.”

1 Corinthians 3:8 (CEV)

HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER

P5

FOCAL POINT → **Philippians 4:1–9 / Romans 14:17–19; / 1 Timothy 2:1**

› FOCUS

We are to live “a life of goodness,” as the text in Romans says (Rom. 14:17-19, NLT).

“The important thing is ... stirring up goodness” (TLB). That sounds good and quite easy, and in theory we all would agree to that. But what does that mean in practice? When one person in the church thinks that one thing is good, and someone else says some-

*It's not about our will or our opinion,
it's not about power or who's right,
it's not about what we like or don't
like. It's about working together to
build up the church of God in this
world, about making it a home for His
children, about becoming a witness
for those who do not yet know Jesus.*

thing else is good and reasonable instead, what should be done? Should it be left to the principle of “might makes right,” so that the loudest or strongest decide the issue?

Thankfully, Paul gives some advice in Romans that goes beyond that: the Holy Spirit desires to fill our hearts and minds, and He is actually the one who leads the church. That means, however, that what we might think or want is not the decisive factor. God's guidance is possible and necessary. It is therefore absolutely imperative that we submit ourselves to Him and His will.

Consequently, praying together is the precondition and foundation for all work in the church: to communicate with God, to seek to know His will, to hear and heed His leadings. That must be the foundation. It's not about our will or our opinion, it's not about power or who's right, it's not about what we like or don't like. It's about working together to build up the church of God in this world, about making it a home for His children, about becoming a witness for those who do not yet know Jesus.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *Think about how praying together, both young and old, and in general all who are involved in the work of your church, could play a more important role.*
- ❓ *How can more people participate in this common prayer?*
- ❓ *Where do you see deficits? Where could more be possible? Perhaps you can note a concrete suggestion and bring it to the next meeting.*

DEALING WITH CONFLICTS

P6

FOCAL POINT → Romans 14:1 / Philippians 4:2

› FOCUS

It's hard to believe what these texts describe: they all believed in Jesus, but the people in the church were still fighting tooth and nail with each other. But you have probably also experienced that yourself. It's nothing new. It was no different back in the times of the apostles. In the course of history, even wars in the name of the Christian religion have not been uncommon. Prayer is the decisive factor in the work of the church, as we have seen yesterday. And yet it still happens: A conflict breaks out. The simple truth is that we are sinful human beings, and, when everyone is involved in building up

A conflict is a signal that something is wrong, but, at the same time, it is a chance to make things better. The decisive question is how the conflict is addressed:

- *It's not about victory or defeat: the goal is to find a win-win solution.*
- *All parties are prepared to work constructively.*
- *There must be an openness for talking about issues and interests, but also about feelings and needs.*
- *The solution is worked out, defined and agreed upon together.*

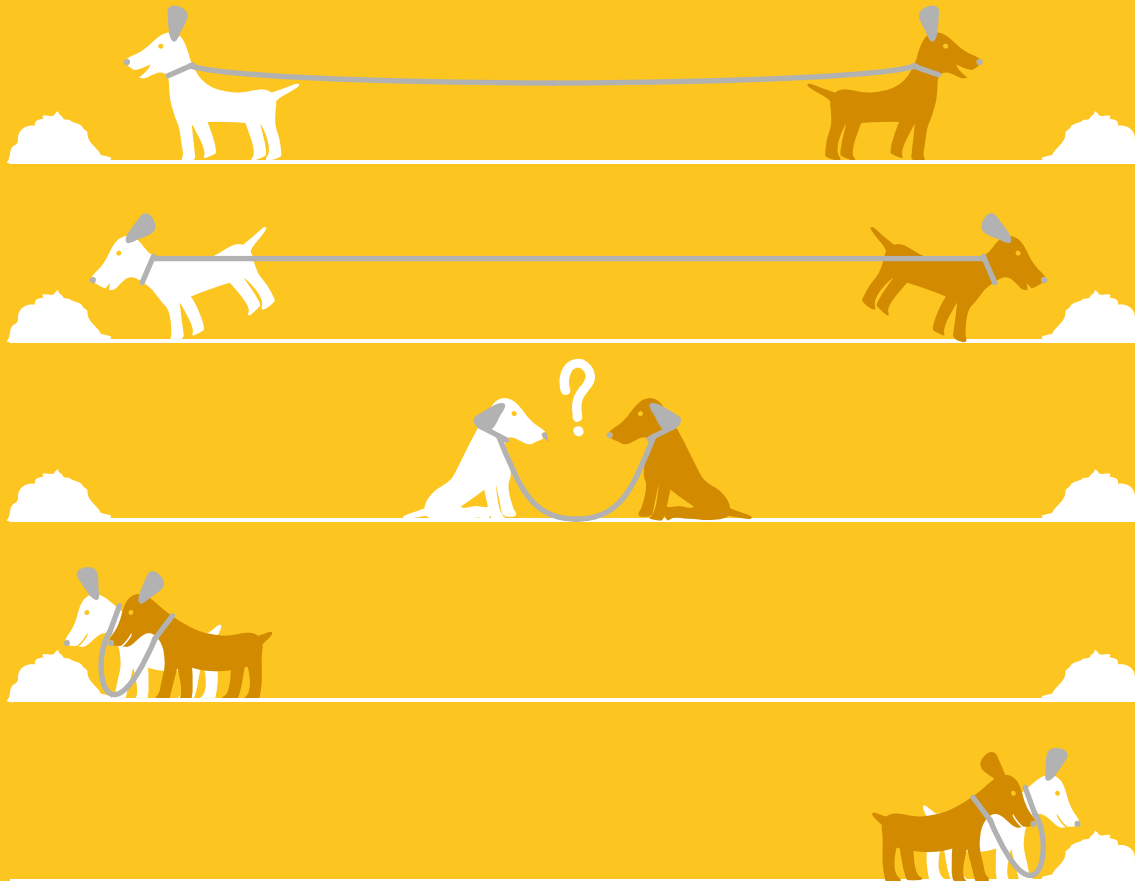
the church, it is inevitable that conflicts will arise. "Settle your disagreement," Paul said to both parties in a conflict, "because you belong to the Lord" (cf. Phil. 4:2, NLT).

If only it were that easy! Sometimes a dispute drags on over decades. Whole churches can be destroyed by it. And that's why it's necessary to deal with conflicts proactively and at an early stage. We need to establish a culture and atmosphere of constructive debate. The issue is not that there should never be any conflicts among Christians. That's not realistic. A conflict can even be very helpful if it is carried out constructively, but it can also be destructive and deadly. This is not just true in the sphere of our private lives, but also in the church. It always depends on how conflict is dealt with. And, here again, prayer is definitely an important factor. But talking with each other and a knowledge of tools and methods for mediating and resolving conflicts are also crucial aspects. These things can and must be learned, and, above all, we must be open to them, and to a constructive resolution of the conflict.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *Are you aware of conflicts in your church?*
- ❓ *Are there any long, festering conflicts? What issues must be addressed?*
- ❓ *Are you perhaps even involved yourself?*
- ❓ *What can you do to change the situation?*
- ❓ *Inform yourself about the issue of constructive conflict resolution. Perhaps it would be appropriate for your church to hold a seminar on the subject with a competent mediator.*

→ Consider this illustration and think about what “participating” and working together is like in your church.



WORSHIPING

7



May this study encourage you to live out worship as daily practical implementation of the Gospel, and to discover opportunities for making the Sabbath a meaningful experience.

WORSHIPING

FOCAL POINT → Acts 2:42–46 / Romans 12:1 / Colossians 3:16–17 / Psalm 122:1

› MOTIF

Worship is not an event or program, but a way of life. It trusts that God is present and lets the biblical truth become reality in everyday life. The “children of God” do not just proclaim the Gospel, but also celebrate and live it out wherever they come together. Studies show that experiencing corporate worship, joy and reverence in singing, music, prayer and preaching has a positive effect on the spiritual life of an individual that extends into everyday living. Churches that desire to grow in respect to their corporate worship are actively committed to making the Sabbath a meaningful experience and shaping worship in such a way that young people can also make a contribution and feel addressed by the services. “The . . . religious exercises should be so planned and managed that they will be not only profitable, but so pleasant as to be positively attractive.”²³ Corporate worship can be oriented on the concrete needs and situation. But a loving, joyful and thankful attitude among those celebrating the worship service is more important than individual program elements.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: Worship—spending time with God together

The Bible speaks about God being present when people gather together in His name. The presence of God makes the difference and transforms a gathering into a worship service.

- ❓ *Read Matthew 18:20: What does it mean to be gathered in the name of Jesus?*
- ❓ *In your view, what is the goal of a worship service?*

Perspective 2: Worship—time for fellowship

In the early Christian church, the worship services were plain and simple, cordial and relationship-oriented, and primarily geared towards fellowship and community, towards the participation of each individual.

- ❓ *Read Acts 2:42, 46–47. How are the elements that characterized the early Christian gatherings being implemented today in your church and its worship services?*
- ❓ *Fellowship thrives on the give-and-take of those involved. What does your church give to you, and what do you personally contribute to your church? Discuss this question with others.*
- ❓ *What do you think is important so that worship services become relationship-oriented, a harmonious collective experience, cordial, and intergenerational?*
- ❓ *Together with others, collect ideas about how you as a small group or as a church can celebrate a harmonious and unforgettable Sabbath.*

Perspective 3: Worship—small groups as a foundation

The early church consisted of many organic, relationship-oriented small groups in which the first Christians witnessed, taught, prayed, sang and encouraged, exhorted and admonished each other. These small groups were an ideal place to grow spiritually, intellectually and socially: a caring place where each church member could become more like Jesus.

- ❓ *Where do you experience close relationships in your church?*
- ❓ *What activities in your church promote these relationships?*

Perspective 4: Worship—serving God and people

Worship means having fellowship with God and others, and making the love of God become tangible for our fellow human beings who are suffering. Ellen White wrote: “The Saviour mingled with men [women, and children] as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”²⁴

- ❓ *In the spirit of the quoted statement: what implications does the way Jesus acted and His attitude have for your own “worship”?*
- ❓ *How can you live out sympathy, compassion and love in your environment?*

Perspective 5: Worship—a way of living

Anything we do can become worship if it is done in close connection with and trusting in Jesus. True worship therefore expresses itself in the way we live our daily lives.

- ❓ *Read 1 Corinthians 10:31. What does Paul mean when he says that everything we do should be for the glory of God?*
- ❓ *How could that be put into practice in daily life?*

Perspective 6: Worship—and the joy of it

Each individual has the responsibility of getting involved in helping to make worship services something that is a joy to participate in and contribute to.

“The usual Sabbath services will suppress growth until three things have become ‘normal’: 1. Believers want to be there; 2. They are proud to bring their friends; 3. Anyone who has ever been there always wants to come back.”²⁵

- ❓ *What is important for you about worship services so that you wouldn’t want to miss them, are eager to bring friends along, and never get tired of attending?*
- ❓ *What can you contribute to help each person attending worship services find encouragement and strength, and be empowered for a life of service?*

WORSHIP—SPENDING TIME WITH GOD TOGETHER

P1

FOCAL POINT → John 4:23–24

› FOCUS

In the Old Testament, worship in the form of a corporate worship service was always associated with the Temple. In the New Testament, Jesus clearly teaches in His conversation with the woman at the well that “the place of worship is insignificant and that it is important to worship God in the Holy Spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24), and that He Himself is already present, if only two or three are gathered together in His name (Matthew 18:20).”²⁶

Therefore, whenever and wherever “two or three” are gathered and honor and worship God together with heart and mind, out of thankfulness and out of a loving mutual

“This is the biblical description of the church: believers—that is, those ‘who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior’—gathering together. No cathedral, no priest, no pastor is needed. ‘For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them,’ Jesus declared (Matt. 18:20).”

Rolf J. Pöhler²⁷

relationship, that constitutes a worship service. That means that corporate worship is an active response to the presence of God, and the reaction of those gathered is in response to His love and grace.

The New Testament does not lay down a specific form for worship or worship services, but rather describes a worship service as an assembly or gathering, or meeting together (cf. Heb. 10:25 and 1 Cor. 5:4). These meetings did not have a liturgical form in New Testament times, but were much rather geared towards the participation of each individual attending and mutual encouragement (1 Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16–17).

And yet worship services are more than just an active meeting. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Bible speaks about God being present when people gather together in His name. The presence of God makes the difference and transforms a gathering into a worship service.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What wishes do you have for spending time with God together as a church?
- ❓ What can you do to promote that?
- ❓ In what way are you involved in the worship services that you attend?
- ❓ What could it be like when each individual is included and involved in worship services?
How do you experience that, for example, in the Bible discussion groups in your church?

WORSHIP—TIME FOR FELLOWSHIP

FOCAL POINT → **Acts 2:42–46**

› FOCUS

When we study the worship services or church gatherings in the early Christian church, we discover that they were different from what we are familiar with today. Church services today are more geared towards an individual or personal experience than towards fellowship.

By contrast, for first Christians, church services were not a program or clearly defined event with the attendees sitting in rows facing a stage, but were rather a gathering where they fellowshiped with each other. That was certainly in part due to the fact that, in the first three centuries, the Christians had no own church buildings of their own, but rather gathered in private homes (Col. 4:15; 1 Cor. 16:15) and celebrated worship services in groups of about 30 people. In Acts 2:42–47, Luke provides us with

“In the early Christian churches, gatherings with no clear-cut liturgical form were the norm. . . . They didn’t adopt the form of the synagogue services, because these did not allow the individuals in the congregation to participate (except in singing and prayers).”

Udo Worschech³⁰

a glimpse into what worship services meant for the early Church. These verses make it clear that in the early church, besides prayer and teaching, fellowship and a sense of community played a major role in the small house churches.

Their gatherings were oriented on unity, solidarity and the active involvement of each individual. The worship services in the early Adventist Church were also very different from how they are today: “They came together in private homes and barns and practically everywhere there was enough space. They did not hold any formal services.”²⁸ Russell C. Burrill also points out that “the most important part of early Adventist church life was gathering as a community.”²⁹

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *How do you experience fellowship in the church services that you attend?*
- ❓ *How can your church consistently promote fellowship between those attending worship services? What can you do personally to contribute?*

WORSHIP—SMALL GROUPS AS A FOUNDATION

P3

FOCAL POINT → Acts 20:20

› FOCUS

Jesus Himself obviously considered small groups to be the best structure for fellowship, teaching and training, as we can see in how He dealt with His disciples. Not only did the small group He established found the Christian church, but it also fundamentally changed the whole world. And for the early Christian church as well, small groups were not merely a component in church life, but were essentially their whole way of life in the first few centuries (Rom. 16:3–5; 1 Cor. 16:19).

The small group is a safe space where people can truly be themselves without being judged. It is a place with a loving and caring atmosphere where people can grow and

“The reports about the early Christian church clearly show that its existence was rooted in the fellowship of its members and not in having its own buildings or programs. Such a fellowship could only be realized in a small group structure with house churches. Still today, small groups that meet regularly to have true fellowship with each other are essential in maintaining healthy local church congregations.”

Udo Worschech³³

develop spiritually, learn from each other, and support one another in their life of faith. It is essential to be able to trust and confide in one another for faith to develop and grow. “Therefore, participation in small groups is not an option, but a necessity of community affiliation. It seems to have been the absolute basis in the early church and the early Advent community.”³¹

In the early days of the Adventist Church, Ellen White also contributed greatly to the establishment of social meetings so that members could fellowship and share personal testimonies and experiences with each other. The early Adventists often held social meetings instead of a church service with a sermon. Ellen White gave the following advice for when a church congregation was too large for this: “The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. . . . Let them keep their bond of union unbroken, pressing together in love and unity, encouraging one another to advance, each gaining courage and strength from the assistance of the others.”³²

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What opportunities do you see in a small group?
- ❓ What can you learn from small groups that can be applied to our worship services?

WORSHIP—SERVING GOD AND PEOPLE

P4

FOCAL POINT → Romans 12:1

› FOCUS

In Romans 12:1, Paul uses the term *latreia*, which means [act of] “service” in connection with what truly worshiping God should be like: “And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him” (NLT). In other words, what Paul is saying here is that **serving** God is the highest form of worship. Paul reminds us that worshiping God must be more than mere rituals, traditional practices, or, at that time, animal sacrifices. Worship is about committing and living one’s own life for God in daily life. In other words: worship is serving God in the sense of utter devotion. That in turn means truly seeing others and serving them. Paul defines what such a life of worship that is “pleasing to God” (NIV) looks like in the verses that follow, for example with authentic love (v. 9), with mutual honor and respect (v. 10), with practical help when other believers are in need and with hospitality (v.13), with intercessory prayer (v. 14), and with genuine sympathy and compassion (v.15). Jesus Himself emphasized this when He closed His teaching on the end times with the parable of the final judgment and described what the decisive factor is: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40, NIV). James defined “pure and faultless” religion as caring for widows and orphans: that is, for the needy in our society (James 1:27, NIV). God chose the care we show for our fellow human beings, because true worship and real love reveal themselves in the way we reach out to, treat and relate to those who are needy.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

John writes: “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18, NIV).

- ❓ *How successful are you at loving “with actions and in truth”?*
- ❓ *What does that look like in concrete practice?*
- ❓ *If you have experienced being loved in this way, what was it like?*
- ❓ *Today, look for a needy fellow human being, and do something good for him or her.*

“True worship consists in working together with Christ. Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on; but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree.”

Ellen G. White³⁴

WORSHIP—A WAY OF LIVING

B5

FOCAL POINT → Colossians 3:16–17

› FOCUS

Serving God and worship cannot be reduced to two hours in the church services on the Sabbath. Worship consists in incorporating Jesus into our daily lives, and in asking ourselves again and again what He would do in the different situations we experience. That means that everything that a Christian does should be a form of worship. “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17, NIV).

“Everything a Christian does should be a form of worship. Unless God honors all we do, our worship will be a cheap imitation on Sabbath morning as well.”

Russell C. Burrill³⁶

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, His father acknowledged Him, saying: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17, NIV). With these words, God was certainly not just referring to Jesus’ obedience in submitting to baptism, but also to the 30 years that Jesus had lived in an inconspicuous and normal everyday life up to that point: because, as a human being, Jesus also experienced highs and lows, joy and tears, hope and determination—and ultimately, at the end of his life on earth, also betrayal and death on the cross. The question that now arises is the following: was Jesus more pleasing for God when He was healing the sick, or when He was celebrating with His friends at a wedding? Was He more dedicated to His Father when He was teaching in the synagogue, or when He was in the boat, exhausted and sleeping deep and sound? Was He holier at the transfiguration on the mountain, or when He spat on the ground, making mud and spreading it on the eyes of a blind man to give him his sight? Was He more like His Father when He was overturning the tables of the buyers and sellers in the temple, or when He let the children come so He could place His hands on them and bless them? Graham Kendrick points out that “His whole life was an act of worship, and even the most ordinary things were done to the delight of His Father.”³⁵

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What does worshipping God in daily living mean for you?
- ❓ What helps you to live out your faith in daily life, and where are the challenges?
- ❓ What do you find to be particularly difficult? What is easier? Tackle one of these challenges today!

WORSHIP—AND THE JOY OF IT

P6

FOCAL POINT → Psalm 122:1

› FOCUS

Pastors, church elders and members all have a great responsibility for preparing and conducting church services so that the collective worship becomes an experience in which God is honored and all those who attend are strengthened, encouraged and inspired. Attractive and interesting church services were also an important concern for Ellen White. She emphasized: “The evil of formal worship cannot be too strongly depicted, but no words can properly set forth the deep blessedness of genuine worship.”³⁷ Elsewhere, she also wrote: “Our meetings [for worship] should be made intensely interesting. They should be pervaded with the very atmosphere of heaven. Let there be no long, dry speeches and formal prayers merely for the sake of occupying the time. . . . Thus the interest will be kept up to the last. This is offering to God acceptable worship. His service should be made interesting and attractive and not be allowed to degenerate into a dry form.”³⁸ Church worship as described above is an expression of the joy of believing in God, and conveys the feeling that King David described with the following words: “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’” (Ps. 122:1, NIV). In his book, *The Big Four: Secrets to a Thriving Church Family*, Joseph Kidder describes four essential characteristics for inspiring worship services, as well as their objective: “Every service should inspire us to experience God or Christ in a meaningful way. He should lead us to the throne of mercy, where we receive hope and new life and are inspired to love and serve.”³⁹

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What do you look forward to when you go to church worship services?
- ❓ Which parts of the worship services could be made more “attractive” and “interesting”? What can you do to contribute to that?
- ❓ Which of the characteristics described by Joseph Kidder (see list below) do you experience in the worship services that you attend? Which are missing? How could you help to promote them?

Joseph Kidder lists seven characteristics for an inspiring worship service:⁴⁰

1. Experience the presence of Christ
2. Experience God’s love and mercy
3. Become filled with hope
4. Be loved by the church community
5. Become changed
6. Become motivated for service
7. Enjoy the good quality of the presentations

“It is the duty of those connected with the church to feel an individual responsibility to do to their utmost ability to strengthen the church, and make the meetings so interesting that outsiders or unbelievers will be attracted to your meetings.”

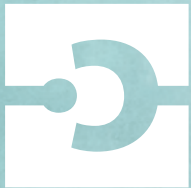
Ellen G. White⁴¹

“God is displeased with your lifeless manner in His house, your sleepy, indifferent ways of conducting religious worship. You need to bear in mind that you attend divine service to meet with God, to be refreshed, comforted, blessed, not to do a duty imposed upon you.”

Ellen G. White⁴²

TEACHING

8



May this study encourage you to explore and discover the Word of God and the fundamental Adventist beliefs, and to share them with others in relevant, creative and practical ways.

TEACHING

FOCAL POINT → 1 John 1:1–3 / Romans 10:17 / James 1:22

› MOTIF

The “Valuegenesis Europe” study shows that preaching that reaches young people is the most significant aspect of their church experience. When young people say that the preaching in their church is usually relevant for their lives and engages their feelings, then the probability is eight times greater that they will stay in the church—compared with youth who do not have that experience. Young people are looking for Christian values and Adventist beliefs that are based on the Bible, put Jesus Christ at the focus, and are taught in a way that is relevant to their lives. Intergenerational churches therefore strive to communicate the Gospel and biblical truth in such a way that it reaches their young people. They are sensitive to, and open for, the spiritual needs of their youth, and engage with them in their church services, discussion groups on Sabbath, and at other church activities.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: Christian teaching places the focus on Jesus

Healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is not a system of abstract truths, but places the focus on Jesus Christ. In his gospel and letters, the apostle John wrote as someone whose entire life had been changed by meeting Jesus.

❓ *Which of his experiences with Jesus come to your mind?*

Perspective 2: Christian teaching is valuable for growing in faith

Healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is of inestimable value, because it helps people to grow in faith.

- ❓ *Where have you personally experienced how your faith has developed?*
- ❓ *How did it happen?*
- ❓ *What would you say about your faith in Jesus if you only had only 30 seconds to say it?*
- ❓ *How could your personal confession of faith be formulated if you only had 20 words to say it?*

Perspective 3: Christian teaching takes place in personal relationships

Healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is not isolated and out of touch with real life, but takes place naturally in our personal relationships in everyday life.

- ❓ *What could some concrete lessons from everyday life for teaching and sharing our faith look like?*
- ❓ *What do you think about the following statement: “Only those who themselves seek to learn have the right to teach.”*
- ❓ *What should we as teachers seek to learn?*

Perspective 4: Christian teaching is holistic—engaging heart and mind

Healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is a holistic concept—it addresses and engages both our minds and our emotions.

- ❓ *Are you more of a rational or an emotional person when it comes to your faith?*

- ❓ *What are some dangers that result from a one-sided focus on rational understanding, or on emotional experiences?*
- ❓ *What can you do to live a balanced life of faith involving both the heart and mind?*
- ❓ *How can your church help to keep a balance between rationality and emotion?*

Perspective 5: Christian teaching is creative and practical

Healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is not out of touch with the real world or abstract, but rather creative and practical.

- ❓ *In your view, what makes a sermon a good sermon?*
- ❓ *What creative forms of preaching have you experienced? Share them with the other members of the group.*

Perspective 6: Christian teaching motivates to action

Healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is practically oriented—it inspires and motivates us to take action.

- ❓ *What connection is there between teaching and action in our church?*
- ❓ *What would have to happen so that we would act more strongly on our faith and beliefs?*

Preaching that reaches young people is the most significant aspect of their church experience.

CHRISTIAN TEACHING PLACES THE FOCUS ON JESUS

P1

FOCAL POINT → 1 John 1:1

› FOCUS

The apostle John places the focus of his teaching not on some lofty theories, but rather on what he personally experienced with Jesus. This is reflected both in the introduction to his gospel (John 1:1–18) and at the beginning of his letters. He writes as someone whose entire life had been changed by meeting Jesus. Thus healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is not a system of abstract truths, but always places the focus on Jesus Christ.

The “Word of life” (1 John 1:1) has two meanings: “On the one hand, the Word itself is life, because Jesus Christ is life. The Word cannot be separated from His person; it is not something that He says, but what He is (cf. John 1:14). Jesus does not bring a certain message to us; He Himself as a person is the message. . . . On the other hand:

“The Word became flesh, not a library! The Gospel has been revealed in the form of concrete historical events and not in a system of religious principles. To turn the Good News into the Good Theory is to betray the manger, the cross, and the open grave.”

Magnus Malm⁴⁵

Jesus Christ also brings life. The words He speaks create life. Just like in the beginning at the creation, . . . rebirth also occurs through the Gospel.”⁴³ Jesus speaks and embodies words that are full of power: words that are intended to move us to repent and change our ways, and thus create new life in us.

“John doesn’t write about visions, he doesn’t present some church growth program, he doesn’t talk about anything at all that we have to do; he is simply full of quiet joy because all the things that we yearn for have already become reality in our midst. The Word has become human, the promises and visions have become part of real life. Holiness is no longer an unattainable ideal, but rather a living body with a face, eyes and hands. He, Jesus, is the Trustworthy One! And the church? That is just simply the people who gather around Him to see Him, to touch Him, to seek fellowship with Him. The church is not a group of people that have brought an organization to life; it consists of people who gather around the One who is life.”⁴⁴

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

❓ “Jesus, reveal to me once again who You really are. Help me to recognize Your true nature, I pray. I long to know You. Open my eyes that I may truly see. And free me from my false assumptions about You.”

CHRISTIAN TEACHING IS VALUABLE FOR GROWING IN FAITH

P2

FOCAL POINT → John 16:12–15 / Romans 10:17

› FOCUS

Here we see how important teaching His disciples was for Jesus, and, at the same time, Jesus demonstrates what a good teacher does. He adapts His teaching to His disciples and doesn't tell them more than they can understand at the moment. It's not important for Him to pass on all His knowledge at once, but, at the same time, teaching is so important for Him that He entrusts the task to the Holy Spirit. These verses also reveal a principle that applies throughout the whole history of God's dealing with human beings: God's revelation is a progressive revelation in which the human knowledge about God gradually develops and unfolds, strengthening their faith. Healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is therefore also of inestimable value because it helps people to grow in faith.

Faith comes—as Paul says—from hearing (Rom. 10:17). In the Greek language, the words hearing (v. 17), preaching (v. 15) and heeding/obeying/accepting (v. 16) all belong to the same family. Faith, therefore, can only emerge and grow in the context of hearing and obeying the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Healthy Christian teaching is therefore more than just conveying knowledge or presenting well-reasoned arguments, but is rather geared toward supporting this personal growth process.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ① What do you personally find inspiring about Jesus?
- ① What aspects of His teaching have been particularly enriching for your faith?
- ① Compose your own psalm of thanksgiving.

“It’s not that we already know everything or see everything more clearly, not that we are smarter than everyone else, not that we have long risen above all doubt. No, what we have to say is something completely different, something much bigger than that: Jesus is the Lord who reaches out and pulls us to Himself, despite our doubts and questions; He is the One who calls each and every one of us, who strives to reach each individual—that is what we have to say.”

Manfred Siebold⁴⁶

CHRISTIAN TEACHING TAKES PLACE IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

P3

FOCAL POINT → Deuteronomy 6:1–9

› FOCUS

During the three years of His public ministry in our world, Jesus surrounded Himself with a circle of twelve disciples whom He had chosen personally. Not only did He build up a teacher-student relationship with them, but they took part in His life and work and enjoyed His trust. Imparting knowledge and skills took place in the context of fellowship and a personal connection.

“We need to be much more imaginative when we think about how we can first get people to start listening. We will not achieve a deep connection to people through special events or clever organizational structures, but rather through the experience of being loved. Whether or not we can pass this love on to others is a question of our willingness and ability to relate to other people, and of our own relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Michael Herbst⁴⁸

The Old Testament already makes it clear that spiritual teaching is not an abstract process, but happens naturally within everyday relationships, above all in the family. Spiritual teaching is therefore closely connected with the daily life and experiences of the student. “Faithful parents are aware that they cannot teach their children spiritual values just by talking about them: but values that they show them day after day will ‘stick.’ If children are fed spiritual dogmas, not to change their hearts but to control them, experience shows that this will lead to rejection and rebellion. Clever parents make everyday spiritual lessons out of spiritual truths so that their children have a spiritual foundation on which to build their lives.”⁴⁷

What is true for passing on faith between parents and their children also applies for all other relationships in which we desire to pass on the contents of our faith and beliefs. The desire to pass something on to other people grows out of an inner readiness to be a lifelong learner ourselves, and also to view things from the perspective of our fellow human beings.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ Where have you experienced spiritual growth in everyday life situations?
- ❓ Is there someone who has accompanied you in your life faith to whom could you express your thanks today?
- ❓ What could be an example of an “everyday spiritual lesson” that you could use to tell others about your faith?

CHRISTIAN TEACHING IS HOLISTIC—ENGAGING HEART AND MIND

FOCAL POINT → 1 John 5:11–13 / Luke 2:19

› FOCUS

All teaching is geared toward us as holistic beings. It is important to keep a balance between heart and mind. The report about Mary in the Gospel of Luke shows that, in the Christian faith, these two aspects don't have to be in contradiction with each other. Mary is deeply moved by all the things she experienced concerning the birth of Jesus. She thinks about it often, and it fills both her heart and mind.

And Jesus as a teacher two thousand years ago also followed a holistic approach: He wasn't satisfied with just reaching the people intellectually; He also wanted to reach their hearts. He wanted them to think and feel, but, beyond that, He wanted them also to make decisions and take action. He used various methods to achieve a reaction. He exaggerated and provoked, comforted and encouraged, warned and threatened, all depending on what His audience and the situation required. In his letter, John also emphasizes the fact that Christian teaching is more than mere speculation and theories. Belief leads to a certainty that saturates both our thinking and our emotions. "Faith and belief are not restricted to our thinking or just a feeling. To believe means to 'have,' to live in close personal communion with Jesus Christ."⁴⁹

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

❓ What has God done in your life that you, like Mary, keep "treasured up" in your heart?

"Some people miss heaven by only eighteen inches—the distance between their heads and their hearts."

Corrie ten Boom⁵⁰

FOCAL POINT → Matthew 13:33–35

› FOCUS

It's no coincidence that Jesus used many illustrations and parables in His preaching. Describing colors to the blind is an almost impossible task. But we are confronted with a similar situation when we try to tell others about our faith. Helping someone who doesn't know anything about God understand our faith is no small challenge. Illustrations, examples and parables can be very helpful. They help us to avoid overwhelming our listeners and to explain Jesus in words and concepts they are familiar with and understand.

“So here—concerning the leaven—it's not about the growth of the Word and the church, but rather about the effect of the Word. More precisely: about the power of the message of Jesus. . . . Jesus is therefore making it clear to His listeners that His teaching will one day permeate the whole world. The Word is the message of assurance. . . . Back then, the public teaching [of Jesus] was always in the form of parables—to shake listeners out of their indifference, and to lead them to make a decision for or against following Jesus.”⁵¹

“Really good teachers, however, are not limited to dispelling myths and unmasking illusions, but also excite people to think, whether they want to or not. The parables Jesus taught His disciples had the purpose of preparing the mind for a new way of thinking. Through an artful web of truth and poetry, of reality and simple contexts, both Jesus' adversaries and those in search of the truth were caused to think. In His sermons, Jesus used the parables to move people to new understandings of the

Kingdom of God, and of how receptive they were to the perspective of the Kingdom of God.”⁵²

Today, healthy Christian teaching is still characterized by the fact that it is not out of touch with the real world, and not beyond people's understanding, but much rather connects with their everyday lives in a creative and practical way.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *What illustration or comparison from everyday life today could you use to help people understand what Jesus means to you?*
- ❓ *Paint the illustration as a picture and share it with your discussion group on Sabbath.*

“Back then, the public teaching [of Jesus] was always in the form of parables—to shake listeners out of their indifference, and to lead them to make a decision for or against following Jesus.”

Gerhard Maier⁵³

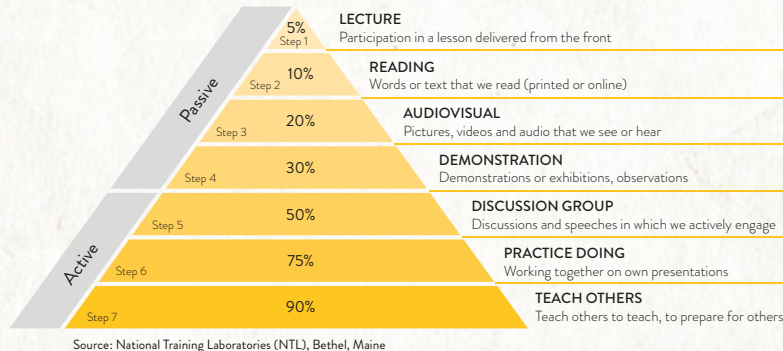
CHRISTIAN TEACHING MOTIVATES TO ACTION

P6

FOCAL POINT → 1 Timothy 1:5 / Matthew 7:24–29

› FOCUS

Healthy Christian teaching and doctrine is practically oriented—it inspires and motivates us to take action. It is good to be a Christian and know it. But it is much better to be a Christian and to show it. The things that we put into practice ourselves and (hopefully) even also teach others will move us much more deeply than things we only hear and keep to ourselves. The following “learning pyramid” impressively illustrates this.



Paul also kept the connection between belief and action in mind when he was telling others about the Christian faith. “The instruction is geared toward practical discipleship, not toward increasing theoretical knowledge. Apparently, tempting alternatives in the other direction also already existed back then! A few sentences later, when Paul explains why he has the right to call himself an apostle, he doesn’t refer to his excel-

lent education, but rather points out that he is the greatest of all sinners (1 Tim. 1:16). What is it that qualifies Paul as a spiritual role model? The fact that he has experienced the grace of God practically in his own life as a personal example for those whom he has led to Christ.”⁵⁴

Jesus Himself appealed to the common sense of His listeners at the close of the Sermon on the Mount. For Him, the decisive factor determining which path we take with regard to His teachings is not just a question of an emotional reaction, but rather a conscious decision that also takes the consequences into account (see also James 1:22).

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

❓ In what ways do your beliefs lead to concrete actions in your everyday life?

“Nothing good will be done unless someone does something good.”

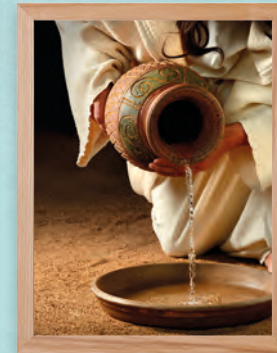
Erich Kästner, German writer, 1899–1974

“The events of the life of Jesus have been written down so that you can experience Him today as they did then: in close relationship between Father and Son. John writes that you can have the same friendship with Jesus that he experienced. That’s why Jesus became human. If you do not know His impressive nature—playful, sophisticated, passionate, impatient with human religion, friendly, creative, disrespectful, funny—then you have been cheated. If you do not experience daily close relationship with this Jesus, if you do not know what support His presence in your life means, and if you do not hear Him speaking to you personally, then you’ve been robbed. If you do not experience the power because Jesus lives in you, shapes your character, and heals your brokenness so that you can live as He did, then you have been robbed.”

John Eldredge⁵⁵

SERVING

9



May this study encourage you to follow the example of Jesus by ministering to the needs of others and finding new ways of serving.

SERVING

BP

FOCAL POINT → **Philippians 2:6–8 / Mark 10:42–45 / Matthew 25:31–46 / Micah 6:6–8 / Isaiah 58:6–10 / Jeremiah 22:13–16**

› MOTIF

“The church is organized for service.”⁵⁶ This attitude is a fundamental principle in the church of Christ, and it is also the prerequisite for all mission. Sincere service for others results from knowing and experiencing that we ourselves are richly blessed by God, and the knowledge that God desires to pour out His blessings on every one of His creatures. Such service is always interested in the eternal and earthly well-being of our fellow human beings, and is not tied to any expectations or conditions. Serving others as means to an end is not in harmony with the example that Jesus gave us. In a society that is saturated with information, our attitude of practical service is the most effective way to communicate God’s love to the world and to make a difference in it: because actions speak louder than words.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: Serving means choosing the path of powerlessness

God became a man, was born in a stable, grew up as a refugee, worked as a carpenter, was later a wandering preacher, had no possessions, lived among outcasts, was rejected by His own countrymen and finally was murdered on the cross. God chose to take this path: fully aware of the consequences; completely of His own free will;

unswervingly . . . and it is His great desire that His followers also choose the path of powerlessness (Mark 10:42–45).

- ❓ *What significance does Mark 10:44 have in your life and the life of your church?*
- ❓ *In which concrete situations do you put this principle into practice?*

Perspective 2: Serving means striving for justice

Justice is a central concern in the Bible. More than 3,000 verses deal with poverty and justice. In the Hebrew Bible, justice is more a social than moral category: a person who is just deals compassionately with others and grants them what they are entitled to as a beings created by God.

- ❓ *In your opinion, what do you think people, animals, and nature are entitled to as creatures and creation made by God?*
- ❓ *Where do we as a society not act justly?*
- ❓ *What contribution can you and your church make to foster justice?*

Perspective 3: Serving means making the kingdom of God become tangible for other people

The old Star Trek TV series coined the phrase: “Beam me up, Scotty!” But Jesus teaches just the opposite: “Your kingdom come!” As followers of Jesus, it is our task to perceive the beginnings of God’s kingdom, to think and act according to the standards of the kingdom of God, and to make this reality something our fellow human beings can experience.

- ❓ Read Mark 1:15. Where do you perceive the kingdom of God?
- ❓ How do you live out the kingdom of God—maybe even in contradiction to the spirit of the times—in your work, in your everyday life, in your family?

Perspective 4: Serving means sharing the blessings of the Sabbath with others

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). Shouldn't His example then be a model for how we celebrate the Sabbath? Jesus made it His custom to go the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16), but afterwards He didn't just go home. He was out with the people, in the middle of their struggles and needs: deliberately; consciously; for the sake of the people. Jesus also routinely healed diseases on the Sabbath that were not immediately life-threatening, even though it sparked controversy in the community (Mark 3:1–6).

- ❓ *"It is the sabbath which manifests the world's identity as creation, sanctifies it and blesses it."⁵⁷ What changes for you when you consciously approach your fellow human beings and nature as God's creation?*
- ❓ How can you as Sabbathkeeper share the blessings of the Sabbath with the people around you?

Perspective 5: Serving means having the towel mentality

On His last evening with His disciples, Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Each one's feet. Even the feet of Judas. Thus Jesus initiated a ritual that His followers should also practice. This ritual isn't about cleanness (John 13:10–11), but about serving our fellow human beings: unconditionally; without getting anything in return; without any expectations. That is the "towel mentality."

- ❓ How do you feel when you wash someone else's feet? What inner attitude do you take?

- ❓ What helps you to serve unconditionally—without getting anything in return, without any expectations?

Perspective 6: Serving means becoming a blessing for our world

God blessed Abraham in order to make him a blessing for the whole world (Gen. 12:1–3). We, too, should be a blessing for our world: a blessing in word and deed; as one who speaks blessings and is a blessing—for we are already blessed by God, with possessions, with education, with family, with good companions, and with a faith which can move mountains.

- ❓ Write a blessing for someone in your social environment. Be as concrete and practical as possible. Lay your hand on her or him and bestow the blessing. How does it feel to bless another person?

SERVING MEANS CHOOSING THE PATH OF POWERLESSNESS

P1

FOCAL POINT → Isaiah 52:13–53:12 / Mark 10:42–45 / Philippians 2:6–8

› FOCUS

A popular music group in Germany called “Die Prinzen” (The Princes) wrote a song with the title “Du musst ein Schwein sein in dieser Welt” (“You Have To Be a Hog in this World”). It was big hit when it came out in 1995, probably because it reflects—although with a good portion of irony—the widespread belief that you have to be harsh and ruthless in the game of life in order to be successful. In the words of the song: “Because I know that I can get away with it, I always go straight to the front of the line, and if there’s someone who’s meek and weak, just listen how I laugh him out; I’m an expert when it comes to exploiting a helpful colleague, and although no one likes me, I’ll soon be a mighty politician.”

The German language even has a special figure of speech for this kind of attitude: “Radfahrermentalität” (“bicyclist mentality”), which basically means “to kiss up kick down,”—because of the posture and movement while pedaling a bicycle. And this attitude is not just a modern problem. All of human history, including biblical history, is full of examples, and, thanks to the theory of evolution with the “survival of the fittest” principle, this way of thinking is now also more scientifically justified.

Against this background, it would seem downright absurd for the almighty and omnipresent God—the One who had created this world and everything in it in the first place—to choose the path of powerlessness: by becoming a man who was born in a stable, grew up as a refugee, worked as a carpenter, was later a wandering preacher, had no possessions, lived among outcasts, was ridiculed and rejected by many of his own religion, and finally was brutally murdered on the cross.

But God did choose the path of powerlessness: consciously; of His own free will; unswervingly . . . and it is His great desire that His followers also choose the path of powerlessness (Mark 10:42–45).

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Jesus said to His disciples: “Whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else” (Mark 10:44, NLT).

- ❓ What significance does this text have in your life and the life of your church?
- ❓ In which concrete situations do you put this principle into practice?

“Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”

Philippians 2:6–8 (NLT)

SERVING MEANS STRIVING FOR JUSTICE

P2

FOCAL POINT → Psalm 146:7–9 / Luke 4:18–19 / Matthew 25:31–46 / Deuteronomy 10:17–19 / Zechariah 7:9–10 / Micah 6:6–8 / Isaiah 58:6–10

› FOCUS

Justice is a central concern in the Bible. More than 3,000 Bible verses deal with the issues of poverty and justice.⁵⁸ There are two concepts of justice in the Hebrew language:⁵⁹

1. *mishpat*, or “rectifying justice” on behalf of victims of injustice (see Zech. 7:9–10; Ps. 146:7–9; Deut. 10:18; Mic. 6:6–8).

2. *tzadeqah*, or “primary justice,” a manner of conduct that, if it were to prevail in our world, would make “corrective justice” completely unnecessary. Often we find the terms *mishpat* and *tzadeqah* used in combination (see Jer. 22:13–16; Ezek. 18:5–7).

When we consider both terms, it becomes clear that justice in a biblical sense is a **social** concept. It’s about dealing with each other in a way that is just, fair, compassionate and generous, and about granting all people what they are entitled to as beings created by God; it’s not about my private moral conduct (see Job 31:13–23).⁶⁰

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ If practicing justice means granting all people what they are entitled to as beings created by God, then what do you think a person, an animal, and nature are entitled to?
- ❓ Where do we as a society not act justly?
- ❓ What contribution can you and your church make to foster justice?

“The just man suffers under this world; the unjust does not. . . . The just man suffers under the injustice, futility and perversity of world events, he suffers under the destruction of the divine institutions of marriage and family. He not only suffers under these things because they cause him hardship, but also because he recognizes something ungodly in them. The world says: That’s just the way things are; they will always be that way, and they must be that way. The just man says: That’s not the way things should be; that goes against God.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁶¹

SERVING MEANS MAKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD BECOME TANGIBLE FOR OTHER PEOPLE

P3

FOCAL POINT → Matthew 6:9–10 / Mark 1:14–15 / Luke 8:1; 9:1–6 / Acts 1:3; 28:23, 30–31

› FOCUS

What do you think the Gospel is, the Good News that Jesus preached? Is the Good News an answer to the question: How do I get into heaven? Or did Jesus much rather give us an answer to the question: How do I get a piece of heaven here on earth?

The old *Star Trek* TV series coined the phrase: “Beam me up, Scotty!” Jesus taught just the opposite in the Lord’s Prayer when He said: “Your kingdom **come!**”

The New Testament is very clear on this: the Good News is the kingdom of God, and “that already today, we can begin living a new life in the kingdom of God when we trust in Jesus.”⁶²

That’s why it is our task as followers of Jesus to perceive the beginnings of kingdom of God, to think and act according to the standards of the kingdom of God, and to make this reality something our fellow human beings can experience. “... the gospel is good news, especially for those who don’t believe it. . . . If the gospel isn’t good news for everybody, then it isn’t good news for anybody.”⁶³

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Jesus says: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

❓ *Where do you perceive the kingdom of God?*

❓ *How do you live out the kingdom of God—maybe even in contradiction to the spirit of the times—in your work, in your everyday life, in your family?*

“A lot of people think the only real reason Jesus came was to die on the cross. That is not the only reason. Jesus came as the kingdom bringer. His gospel was the availability of the kingdom. His purpose was to manifest the kingdom. His one command was to pursue the kingdom: ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God.’ His one plan was to extend the kingdom.”

John Ortberg⁶⁴

SERVING MEANS SHARING THE BLESSINGS OF THE SABBATH WITH OTHERS

P4

FOCAL POINT → Mark 2:23–28; 3:1–6 / John 9:13–16; 5:1–16 / Deuteronomy 5:13–15 / Leviticus 25

› FOCUS

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). Shouldn't His example then be a model for how we celebrate the Sabbath? Let's take a look at the way Jesus kept the Sabbath: Jesus did go to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was His custom (Luke 4:16), but afterwards He didn't just go home. He was out with the people, in the middle of their struggles and needs: deliberately; consciously; for the sake of the people. Jesus also routinely healed diseases on the Sabbath that were not immediately life-threatening (Mark 1:21–26, 29–31; 3:1–5; John 5:5–9; 9:1–14; Luke 13:10–13; 14:1–5). This aspect of His Sabbathkeeping was apparently so important for Jesus that He even risked sparking controversy in the community (Mark 3:1–6).

The fact that the Sabbath is not just about rest, but also about liberation, is as old as the Ten Commandments themselves (Deut. 5:15). And even the “exponents” of the Sabbath—the sabbath year (Lev. 25:1–7) and the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–55)—make it clear that, in God's concept of the Sabbath, ecology and social justice are not just marginal issues.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

In one of his books, the Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann penned this conviction: “It is the sabbath which manifests the world's identity as creation, sanctifies it and blesses it.”⁶⁵

- ❓ What changes for you when you consciously approach your fellow human beings and nature as God's creation?
- ❓ How can you as Sabbathkeeper share the blessings of the Sabbath with the people around you?

“The peace of sabbath is peace with God first of all. But this divine peace encompasses not merely the soul but the body too; not merely individuals but family and people; not only human beings but animals as well; not living things alone, but also, as the creation story tells us, the whole creation of heaven and earth.”

Jürgen Moltmann⁶⁶

SERVING MEANS HAVING THE TOWEL MENTALITY

P5

FOCAL POINT → John 13:13–15

› FOCUS

It was customary to wash the dusty feet of guests before eating together. This was usually done by the lowest servant in the household. But, on this evening, Jesus wanted to deliberately break with conventions. He stood up; bound a towel around His waist; poured water into a bowl; and washed His disciples' feet. The reactions of the disciples reveal how extraordinary this event was. But Jesus wanted it to be so: because He wanted to institute a ritual for His followers to observe and that they should perform for each other. It's not about cleanness, because Jesus washed the feet of all of them, both the clean and the unclean among them (John 13:10–11). Jesus explained the ritual quite simply with the words: "I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you" (John 13:15, NLT). For Jesus, this footwashing is apparently simply a humble act of service for His disciples. And this act of service is so important to Him that, on their last evening together, He commands His followers to keep it as a ritual. They are to do as He did: for each other; again and again.

And something else is also very important: Jesus washed the feet of all of His disciples. He didn't exclude or leave anyone out. Not even Judas—although Jesus knew that, within only a few hours, Judas would lead the soldiers to Him. Jesus was willing to serve unconditionally; without getting anything in return; without any expectations. And His followers should be prepared to do the same. That is the "towel mentality."

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

In our churches, the footwashing usually only takes place in the context of the Lord's Supper. But it doesn't have to be that way. The footwashing as a ritual of unconditional service has a distinct meaning of its own. In chapter 13 cited above, John doesn't even mention the classic Lord's Supper celebration. Therefore: wash feet! Today! At home! For example, the feet of family and friends. Explain to them why you're doing it, and sense how this act of service impacts your relationship. Here's a little tip: bath additives and foot cream will intensify the experience.

❓ *What helps you to serve unconditionally—without getting anything in return, without any expectations?*

"Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin."

John 13:3–5 (NLT)

SERVING MEANS BECOMING A BLESSING FOR OUR WORLD

P6

FOCAL POINT → Genesis 12:1–3 / Matthew 25:31–40

› FOCUS

Have you found an answer to the question about the meaning of your life? One possibility for finding your personal answer to this difficult and complex issue could be found in embracing the mission that God gave to Abram and making it your own:

“I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:2–3, NLT).

It would serve to benefit our world and our society, if we as the Adventist Church would decide to be a blessing for the world: a blessing in word and deed; as one who speaks blessings and is a blessing.

On the one hand, it is our mission to bring hope to this world by speaking words of reassurance, by perceiving and talking about the good that exists in this world—like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who, even in the midst of the sinister Nazi regime, could still pen the following lines: “The righteous man’s answer to the suffering that the world inflicts on him is blessing. That was God’s answer to the world, which crucified Christ: blessing. God does not repay like with like, and so the righteous shall not do so. Do not judge; do not scold: bless. The world would have no hope if it were not so. The world lives and has a future from the blessings of God and the righteous. Bless, lay hands on someone and say: in spite of everything you belong to God.”⁶⁷ Could it be that we might be blessing far too little?

Matthew 25:31–40 also makes it clear that Jesus doesn’t just want us to speak good words, but that we ourselves are to become a blessing for our fellow human beings; because God has already blessed us immensely: with possessions; with education; with family; with good companions . . . and with a faith which can move mountains.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Write a blessing for someone in your social environment. Be as concrete and practical as possible. Lay your hand on her or him and bestow the blessing.

❓ How does it feel to bless another person?

“The world lives and has a future from the blessing of God and the righteous. Bless, put your hand on someone and say: in spite of everything you belong to God.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁶⁸

In the New Testament, the Greek word ekklesia stands for a church gathering or assembly of Christians. But the translators of the Septuagint also used it for the Old Testament gathering of God's covenant people. They apparently deliberately chose a term with very significant political connotations, because, since the 5th century BC, ekklesia had been used to describe the general assembly of the citizens of a Greek city that were eligible to vote, which was convened to make decisions that affected the well-being of the city as a whole. This understanding would have echoed in the minds of New Testament readers when they read about the ekklesia of Jesus. The author John Reimer therefore comes to the conclusion:

“As ekklesia the church of Jesus is the entity responsible for well-being . . . in this world. God consults with the church in matters concerning the people within its area of influence. But, if this public character of the ekklesia is taken away, the assembly becomes a mass of people torn apart from the world that no longer feel any responsibility for the world, but are instead concerned only with their own salvation.”⁶⁹

The church is a place where believers take responsibility for this world. That is a fascinating thought for me. For you, too?

RECONCILING

10



May this study encourage you to work actively for reconciliation and healing in people's relationships with God, as well as with each other.

RECONCILING

FOCAL POINT → 2 Corinthians 5:17–21 / Matthew 18:21–35 / Psalm 32:1–7 / Luke 15:11–24

› MOTIF

Mission work in the ministry of reconciliation keeps Jesus at the focus, is respectful toward other people and takes them seriously. Intergenerational churches are aware of the fact that the invitation to be reconciled with God is only credible when the church itself lives out reconciliation.

Young people in particular are very sensitive to situations where church members don't practice what they preach. Young people say that they would indeed like to invite their non-Adventist or non-Christian friends to come to church, but are often reluctant to do so, not just because of the cultural differences, but also because they sense that message and messenger do not always fit together.

In this respect, the most convincing thing a church can do is to be a church where reconciliation is lived out. Intergenerational churches promote the concept that all members are called to be ambassadors for Jesus and let the Gospel become reality in their lives.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: Reconciliation—being at peace with God

“Peace” doesn't mean just some feeling of inner harmony, but rather the objective fact of a new relationship with God which has practical implications for all aspects of life.

❓ *How does the forgiveness of God change your relationship to Him?*

❓ *Where do you experience the impact of the peace that He desires to give?*

Perspective 2: Reconciliation—being at peace with my fellow human beings and with myself

It only takes one person to forgive, but reconciliation takes two. Forgiveness is a decision to no longer make someone accountable for the injustice that has been done. Reconciliation means that, in the future, both parties can meet each other at eye level.

❓ *What are some other differences between forgiveness and reconciliation?*

Perspective 3: Reconciliation—a question of credibility

When forgiveness and reconciliation are put into practice, it is a sure sign that a Christian church is really living what it believes.

❓ *How do you experience the willingness to forgive and practice reconciliation in the church?*

? *Why is it important that we as Christians live out reconciliation credibly?*

Perspective 4: Reconciliation—a source of deep change

When people experience God's gift of reconciliation, profound changes of many kinds take place.

Grace is free, because the Grace-Giver has paid the price of our transgressions. Grace is not fair, which is what makes it so difficult to comprehend. Grace begins and ends with reconciliation. Where grace is found, we can live life to the full. It is an unfathomable gift of grace when God Himself carries us to the goal, even beyond death and the grave.

? *Where have you experienced the concrete power of God's reconciling grace?*

Perspective 5: Reconciliation—the essence of our message

In a world full of strife and hatred, it is more important than ever that people hear and experience the message of reconciliation. The essence of our message must be that God, in His unfathomable grace, desires to give the gift of reconciliation to all people.

? *What motivates you to tell other people about God's gift of reconciliation?*

? *What discourages or hinders you?*

Perspective 6: Reconciliation—taking practical steps yourself

God yearns for us to take the first step toward reconciliation with our fellow human beings. Where true reconciliation takes place, it is clearly felt by everyone involved.

? *What do you like best about the parable of the prodigal son?*

? *Which symbols or "ceremonies" for reconciliation are you familiar with?*

The most convincing thing a church can do is to be a church where reconciliation is lived out.

RECONCILIATION—BEING AT PEACE WITH GOD

P1

FOCAL POINT → 2 Corinthians 5:19 / Romans 5:1

› FOCUS

The Greek word for reconciliation [*katallasso*] is found multiple times in the New Testament, about half of which appear in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. In this passage it's about the relationship between God and humans. Reconciliation means that anger and hostility are replaced by love and peace. Being "justified" (Rom. 5:1) does not mean that I've put enough effort into being good and am therefore being rewarded by God for it; it much rather describes a new relationship with God. God makes it possible to live a new life, and I can look to the future with hope. "Peace" doesn't mean just some feeling of inner harmony, but rather the objective fact of this new relationship with God. Everything about my salvation is achieved through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. "Peace" is a holistic concept in the Bible, and has a concrete impact in our lives.

"Peace is not the absence of all struggles, but rather the presence of God."

Eva von Tiele-Winckler, German deaconess, 1866-1930

"Peace (Hebrew *shalom*) is an interpersonal and social concept of relationships that presupposes and includes the relationship between God and humans. Completeness of life, peace and well-being are only possible in an intact relationship with God and our fellow human beings (Judg. 18:6; 1 Sam. 20:13). Thus a person can 'live in peace,' 'go in peace,' and 'die in peace.' Peace describes the well-being, safety and justice (justice system) of a society, in both internal and external relationships, e.g. to other tribes and peoples (1 Sam. 7:14; 1 Kin. 4:24; Deut. 20:10 f.). It is this kind of peace in particular that is meant in the greeting: 'Peace be with you!' (Gen. 43:23; Judg. 19:20), which has become a traditional blessing formula... Peace remains a promise in the New Testament. The peace that is perfected in Christ will only be complete in eternity (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1 ff.)... The peace that Christ brings includes all of the blessings God has given throughout the entire history of His dealings with human beings, from the old covenant of peace with His people up until the kingdom of peace following the return of Christ."⁷⁰

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

James Bryan Smith, an American pastor, wrote: "I tried hard not to fall. And because traps were what I thought about, traps were what I fell into. It was not until I began to know God's forgiveness that I stopped constantly looking at sin and instead looked to God."⁷¹

❓ How does the forgiveness of God change your relationship to Him?

RECONCILIATION—BEING AT PEACE WITH MY FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS AND WITH MYSELF

P2

FOCAL POINT → 1 John 4:19–21 / Micah 7:18–19

› FOCUS

“That we love God can be seen in how we in the church love each other, and how we forgive when we have wronged each other in our personal relationships. What we have not learned to do in the church as the ‘family of God,’ we will certainly not be able to do outside of our church.”⁷²

It only takes one person to forgive, but reconciliation takes two. Forgiveness has to do with our conscious will and determination. God Himself is an example for how we can deal with others who have wronged us. He chose not to hold us accountable for our wrongs. God has every right to punish us, but forgiveness means that He chooses not to. That is the thought behind the metaphor of our sins being thrown into the depths of the sea. The deepest part of our world’s oceans lies at 11,034 meters (36,201 feet) in the Mariana Trench in the western Pacific. What a great comparison! If God sinks our sins that deep, then we can and should let go of them and let the matter rest—both concerning ourselves and in dealing with our fellow human beings.

Reconciliation doesn’t just mean granting someone absolution for a deserved punishment. When one person grants another absolution from punishment, the relationship initially takes on an asymmetrical nature. The one who grants absolution takes a higher status, above the one who is granted absolution. But reconciliation goes beyond that, and means that the aggrieved person steps down from his superior position so that it is possible for both parties to meet at eye level with each other. That doesn’t necessarily mean that the relationship that may have existed previously must be continued in the

same way as before. Sometimes you can be reconciled with a former offender and still keep a certain distance to protect yourself. The most profound expression of reconciliation is an authentic hug after a long conflict. When people reconcile with each other, they not only create peace, but they live it out practically.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

C. S. Lewis likened what happens in reconciliation to something that awakens a deep longing for “the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”⁷³

❓ *Where have you experienced this effect of reconciliation yourself?*

*It only takes one person to forgive,
but reconciliation takes two.*

RECONCILIATION—A QUESTION OF CREDIBILITY

P3

FOCAL POINT → Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

› FOCUS

In the Sermon on the Mount, it is not Jesus' intention to diminish the value of worshiping God, but reconciliation between people is more important to Him (Matt. 5:23–24). You cannot have fellowship with God when you refuse to acknowledge to another person that you have wronged him or her. Isaiah had already pointed out to the people of God how insincere its actions were (cf. Isaiah 1:10–17).

“Nobody, not even the best Christian, is able to do the right thing all the time, to never hurt or offend, and to always satisfy the expectations and demands of his fellow human beings. Even born-again Christians do not always perceive everything correctly, are not faultless or sinless. Sometimes they may even have the best intentions, and yet can be completely wrong... The consequences [of this imperfection] quickly set in: We take offense at something, and with this offense we burden ourselves the most. We withdraw internally or distance ourselves openly, terminate friendships, lay down all responsibilities in the church, retreat to another church, or, even worse, turn our backs on the church entirely out of disappointment. The most common reason why people leave the church is because of an interpersonal conflict, not a theological one.”⁷⁴

When Peter came to Jesus and asked how often he should forgive his brother, Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant. There is a stubborn rumor that persists not just among Christians: “To forgive is to forget.” In this parable, we see that the king (= God) did forgive at first, but later indeed remembered very well what it was that He had forgiven. Forgiveness means not insisting on the punishment someone may

deserve, and a decision of the will to no longer to think about the guilt and injury. According to Jesus, when we receive forgiveness from God, we are obliged to also forgive others. If we demonstrate the lack of a forgiving attitude, that can ultimately mean for each of us that we, just like the unforgiving servant, no longer receive the forgiveness of God. On the other hand, when forgiveness and reconciliation are put into practice, it is a sure sign that a Christian church is really living what it believes.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *Where have you experienced strife in your church?*
- ❓ *What role did forgiveness and reconciliation play in the conflict?*

“Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die.”

Anne Lamott⁷⁵

RECONCILIATION—A SOURCE OF DEEP CHANGE

FOCAL POINT → Psalm 32:1–7, 2 Corinthians 5:17

› FOCUS

When I deny, minimize or conceal that I have done wrong and am burdened with guilt, I may at first experience some short-lived relief, but will not find lasting assurance or freedom from the burden. It's no different for me today than what David described in his psalm. The important thing is that my sin and guilt need to be forgiven and covered up by God. The matter is not resolved just because I'm done dealing with it. The gift of reconciliation that Jesus offers leads me to humbly acknowledge: I am a sinner and at the same time justified. I am a new person in Christ. And yet: I remain an imperfect, sinful person. That is precisely why God's promise of reconciliation is meant for me: I am saved from my God-forsakenness and liberated from the need to justify myself. I am granted forgiveness and a new beginning.

“Like a celebration after long mourning, like a warm fire in the cold of night, like a wide gate in a wall of stone, thrown open for the rays of the sun, like a letter after long silence, like an unexpected greeting, like a green leaf on dry branches, like a kiss that says ‘I still like you anyway.’ That’s reconciliation. That’s what true peace must be like. That’s reconciliation. That’s pardoning and forgiveness.”

Jürgen Werth⁷⁶

God’s gift of reconciliation gives me the freedom . . .

- . . . to recognize and acknowledge my share in conflicts.
- . . . to clearly state my guilt and my failures.
- . . . to ask God and my fellow human beings for forgiveness.
- . . . to reassure others that God forgives them.
- . . . to let myself be changed by God and my fellow human beings.

Reconciliation with my fellow human beings means . . .

- . . . seeking truth and openly speaking the truth.
- . . . listening attentively and with empathy.
- . . . asking for forgiveness and forgiving others.
- . . . expressing forgiveness in words and in deeds.
- . . . cultivating trust in positive experiences with each other.
- . . . working together to create new and just structures for living together.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Grace is free, because the Grace-Giver has paid the price of our wrongdoing. Grace is not fair, and that’s why it’s so difficult to comprehend. Grace begins and ends with reconciliation. It is an unfathomable gift of grace when God carries us to the goal, even beyond death and the grave.

❓ *Where have you experienced the concrete power of God’s reconciling grace?*

RECONCILIATION—THE ESSENCE OF OUR MESSAGE

P5

FOCAL POINT → 2 Corinthians 5:18–20

› FOCUS

“It is God Himself speaking through the Gospel preached by the apostle; Jesus Christ Himself pleads with us through the apostle; ‘pleading’ (2 Cor. 5:20) describes the miracle of the grace of God: It doesn’t force itself on anyone. Its ambassadors don’t hold judgment, but rather offer reconciliation. The making of peace is not dictated by God, but Christ rather ‘pleads’ through His ambassadors. . . . That is . . . the most powerful expression of the love of Christ through His ambassadors: He is the One who pleads with us, presents His offer to us, invites us. For the Greek mind, that is a ridiculous thought: a god who pleads is weak. For the Jewish religion, that is a profound offense: a god who only pleads, and doesn’t bring things back to order with an iron fist, destroy the wicked and reward the good, is a weak god. . . . This pleading is the essence of the Gospel that Paul has been commissioned to preach.”⁷⁷

If you want to understand the Christian faith, you have to understand the grace of God. It is the driving force behind the message of reconciliation. God comes near to us in Jesus. He opens His arms wide and offers each of us reconciliation. This experience is truly liberating in every sense of the word. But other people should also hear the message that God, in His unfathomable grace, desires to give His gift of reconciliation to each one of us. In a world full of strife and hatred, it is more important than ever that people hear and experience this message of reconciliation. “Under the banner of reconciliation, every single aspect of our mission and evangelism must serve the goal of rebuilding a lost or broken relationship with God.”⁷⁸

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

“The world can do almost everything as well as or better than the church of Christ. You do not have to be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, and heal the sick. The world can do that too: and maybe even better. There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer mercy.”⁷⁹

❓ What motivates you to tell others about God’s gift of reconciliation?

❓ What discourages or hinders you?

“As a people, we have received great light. This light the Lord has entrusted to us for the benefit and blessing of the world. To us has been given the ministry of reconciliation. With power from on high we are to beseech men to be reconciled to God. . . . The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love for God and for one another.”

Ellen G. White⁸⁰

RECONCILIATION—TAKING PRACTICAL STEPS YOURSELF

P6

FOCAL POINT → **Luke 15:11–24**

› FOCUS

The Bible calls us as Christians to take the first step ourselves—when we have acted wrongly toward a fellow human being (Matt. 5:23–24), and even when someone else has wronged us (Matt. 18:15). Taking the first step is therefore not a sign of weakness, but rather reflects precisely what God wants us to do.

The parable of the prodigal son is a good example of how reconciliation can succeed—at least with respect to the younger son. He also took the first step and sets out on the journey home to his father. What he then experienced at home was far more than he had dared to imagine. Leaving all thoughts of status and dignity behind, his father took off running as soon as he saw his son far off in the distance. He wrapped his arms around his boy, although he most likely was still covered with the stench and filth of the pigpen. The younger son was lavished with the symbols of reconciliation—a ring for his finger, the best clothes, and a joyful celebration with a slaughtered calf. The father

took in the homecomer not as a hired laborer, but received him as his son—just like it was in the beginning. “Reconciliation was also celebrated in ancient Israel. There was a ceremony, there were sacrifices, and there was a Day of Atonement. There is a lesson we can learn from this. When reconciliation finds expression in a ‘ceremony’ (not in a mystical sense or as a cultist ritual), then it becomes a tangible experience. This could be in the form of a letter, a nonverbal gesture, or some other act. Of course, there is no recipe that can guarantee that reconciliation will always be the result. But it is always important for the parties involved to talk with each other, and that they are willing to seek a resolution together.”⁸¹

I can learn to see others with the eyes of a loving God, and to dare to take the first step myself. That is possible for me because God looks at me and says: “Very good! It’s very good that you’re here. There is nothing and no one who can snatch you out of My hand.” When we submit to this love of God, we are not just reconciled with God: we are also reconciled with ourselves and with each other.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ When it comes to making things right again or asking others for forgiveness, is there someone who spontaneously comes to mind?
- ❓ Which active steps toward reconciliation could you take today?

“May the hand of God be a soft pillow for you to rest your head. But if there is someone you need to be reconciled with, may you sleep on a stone.”

Traditional Irish blessing

For the apostle Paul, reconciliation is inseparably linked to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. The cross is a powerful symbol for reconciliation: if we take a closer look at the cross, we discover the two dimensions in which we need reconciliation. First, there is the vertical beam. It points to the relationship between God and humans. The beam breaks through the barrier of separation and stands for a new connection and living fellowship, because we are reconciled with God in Christ. Then there is the horizontal beam, signifying our interpersonal relationships as human beings. If we are reconciled with God, that reconciliation also impacts our everyday relationships. Instead of alienation, new trust grows.

→ There is a movie called *The Grace Card*, released in 2010 by the director David G. Evans, which is a very inspirational film dealing with the issues of guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation.

MENTORING

11



May this study encourage you to integrate inter-generational mentoring in your life of faith, or to promote it!

MENTORING

BP

FOCAL POINT → 2 Timothy 2:2 / Acts 11:25 / John 21:15 / 1 Corinthians 12:7

› MOTIF

Jesus was a Mentor for His disciples, just as Moses was for Joshua and Barnabas was for Paul and Mark. Apart from their parents, young people in particular need adults who are relevant in their lives and serve as living role models. Therefore, churches should not only foster informal intergenerational relationships, but specifically train mentors to be able to accompany others on their spiritual journey. “The classic definition of mentoring is that of an older experienced guide who is acceptable to the young person and who can help ease the transition to adulthood by a mix of support and challenge.”⁸² Youth who have relationships with caring adults are less likely to engage in at-risk behavior, are more self-confident and are more likely to help others compared to those who do not have such relationships. Consequently, mentors in the church can help children, teenagers and youth, as well as newly baptized members and interested guests, to grow spiritually and master the challenges of life. In the same way, young people can also be mentors for older people.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: Mentoring means investing yourself

Mentors look past the facade and see their mentees with a holistic view of their entire personality and faith, with all a person’s challenges and capabilities. Mentors are always willing to adapt and keep trying, to listen to a different perspective and take a new approach, to renew the relationship, and invest more effort in the journey together with their mentees. Mentors bring in their own personality and experience to help their mentees.

- ❓ *Read Acts 9:26–30. What things impress you about the mentoring relationship between Barnabas and Paul? Which aspects would you like to experience yourself?*
- ❓ *When this mentoring relationship began, Paul didn’t have a very good reputation among Christians. How are young people supported in your church? How can we manage to look beyond reputations or facades and see the real person?*

Perspective 2: Mentoring is a relationship

Mentoring thrives on mutual trust between two people who grow during the mentoring process and in their personal relationship with each other. Attention, care, time and prayer are key elements for growing in life and spirituality. In other words: mentoring is not a method, but first and foremost a relationship.

- ❓ *Read 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3 and 1 Thessalonians 3:12. Why is it important to grow in faith, in trust, and in love?*

- ❓ *How do trust and relationships develop and grow in your church?*
- ❓ *How could trust and relationships be promoted?*
- ❓ *Get concrete and start a prayer partnership in which you “adopt” a youth or adult and pray for her or him.*

Perspective 3: Mentoring means growth

Mentoring means growth, and it’s about fostering development to a mature, healthy and spiritually sound personality, investing the appropriate nurture and patience.

- ❓ *Where do you see challenges for development and growth?*
- ❓ *What could be of help in that process?*
- ❓ *How can a church face these challenges to help foster and nurture growth?*

Perspective 4: Mentoring means empowerment

Mentoring is empowerment. Mentors do not just convey their own knowledge and insights, but help their mentees to discover their own individual strengths, capabilities and potential. Together with their younger partners, they seek ways that these gifts can be developed and applied in practice.

- ❓ *Read 1 Peter 4:10: What does Peter encourage us to do?*
- ❓ *What do you think would happen if everyone in the church would seek to serve the others and apply their gifts accordingly?*
- ❓ *What do you think are your gifts and strengths? Who could you help and support with them?*
- ❓ *How could your church promote empowerment and foster individual growth and development?*

Perspective 5: Mentoring means being an example

Young people need adults as role models who live their lives authentically and transparently with their own questions, doubts and difficulties, and who demonstrate how faith can be lived and practiced in success—and perhaps most importantly—as well as in failure.

- ❓ *What expectations do you have of a role model? Are these expectations justified?*
- ❓ *Read Philippians 3:17. What comes to mind when you think about being a role model yourself?*
- ❓ *What would need to happen in your life so that you could say with Paul: “Follow my example”?*

Perspective 6: Mentoring is multiplication

Mentoring is geared towards multiplication and always includes the passing on of knowledge, insights and experience you yourself have gained.

- ❓ *What can you do particularly well?*
- ❓ *Read 2 Timothy 2:2. What have you learned (perhaps also through the help of others) that you could in turn pass on?*
- ❓ *What could that look like in concrete practice?*

MENTORING IS AN INVESTMENT

P1

FOCAL POINT → Acts 11:25

› FOCUS

The term “mentoring” originates from Homer’s *Odyssey*. Odysseus asks his friend Mentor to give his son advice, guidance and instruction during his own absence. Mentor thus becomes his guide and teacher, role model and companion, master and teacher.

The term “mentoring” is not found in the Bible, but examples of this principle can be discovered in both the Old and New Testament. Early in the Old Testament, we already find God bringing mentor together with mentee so that the elder could pass on knowledge and experience, give guidance and support, and invest what was needed to prepare the younger for his future role and ministry (Deut. 1:38). Jesus Himself maintained diverse mentoring relationships that will be considered from various perspectives below.

“A mentor is a person with a serving, giving and encouraging attitude, who discovers the potential that lies in a still-developing person and supports this person on the journey of unfolding the full potential.”

Robert Clinton⁸³

At a time when the Christians were still afraid of Paul as the former persecutor Saul and the Jews were seeking to kill the fresh convert, it was Barnabas who took care of Paul and gave him guidance and support. Barnabas took a risk; he made an investment: he took Paul in, and brought him to the apostles in Jerusalem, where he spoke in his favor (Acts 9:26–30). After that, their ways parted until later when the mentor traveled to Tarsus to look for his mentee (Acts 11:25). From there, the two traveled together to Antioch, where they worked together for a year, and where they were called to be the first missionaries and sent off with blessings for their journey. Their ways only parted again when Barnabas once more took a chance adopting a risky mentee, while Paul preferred to work with a reliable companion. Barnabas was an insightful and courageous man who quickly saw Paul’s potential, remembered him again later, and spared no effort in searching for and instructing him. He invested his time, energy, and essentially himself in order to support Paul and prepare him for the (spiritual) challenges of life.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ Who has been a mentor for you? How has he or she influenced you?
- ❓ Barnabas looked past the facade to discover what made Paul special. Take this same perspective and look at the people in your youth group or church, and try to discover the potential of someone for whom you could be a mentor.

MENTORING IS A RELATIONSHIP

P2

FOCAL POINT → John 21:15

› FOCUS

Mentees will only feel free enough and find the courage to talk about their successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses when a safe and protective context has been established. That's why it takes two individuals who are prepared to open up, get to know and trust each other more and more in order for mentoring to work. This is the only way to build up an open and positive mentoring relationship.

We can certainly learn the most from Jesus as a mentor. The more people were following Him, the more time He invested in His relationships with a few selected coworkers.

- **The circle of the 70 (72):** In Luke 10:1–20, we read that Jesus had a large circle of 70 (72) disciples whom He sent out in teams of two so that they could give each other encouragement and support.
- **The circle of 12:** In Luke 6:12–13, Jesus prayerfully chose twelve disciples whom He accompanied in a special way. They lived and traveled together with their Mentor. They learned not only by listening to His words, but also by observing His actions and His way of approaching people, challenges and difficulties. Jesus invested much time in these twelve men, became their role model, and trained them.
- **The inner circle of 3:** Jesus was even more closely involved in promoting the development of Peter, James and John. They were given special insights into His life and mission, and witnessed crucial events such as the resurrection of Jairus'

daughter (Mark 5:21–43), the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17:1–13), and the events in the night before Jesus was arrested (Matt. 26:36–46).

- **Individual instruction:** Jesus had a close relationship with Peter (John 21:15). The bond of trust between the two was so strong that Jesus could even rebuke him with the most incredibly sharp words (Mark 8:31–33). Even the darkest moment in their relationship could not destroy their trust in each other. As the resurrected Jesus encountered him at the lakeshore, Peter jumped off the boat into the water in order to be close to Jesus as quickly as possible. In the ensuing conversation, Jesus strengthened their relationship and renewed Peter's calling (John 21:15).

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ① *Read the quote from Richard Tyre below, think about the following questions, and give concrete answers. Whom do I trust? Which person in my church has invested effort in me, encourages me again and again, and is a role model for me?*

"Mentoring is knowledge that you tap into; it's a shoulder to lean on, and a kick in the pants."

Richard Tyre⁸⁴

MENTORING AS GROWTH

P3

FOCAL POINT → Philippians 3:12–13

› FOCUS

Without growth and change, we would just stay stuck in a rut, and development and maturity would remain unreachable. Paul was well aware of this when he wrote the following words to the Philippians: “I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race” (Phil. 3:12–14, NLT). Paul is not satisfied with the status quo, but rather makes it clear that a life of faith is dynamic, and must keep developing and growing with a forward-looking perspective. Spiritual growth is a slow and continuous process with the goal of becoming more like Jesus (cf. Eph. 4:15). Just like a newborn child needs the care and attention of its parents, young people also need practical tips and encouragement from older and

more experienced women and men outside of their own family in order to learn what really matters in life, and to find and live out their own priorities.

Mentors are therefore committed to nurturing the development of mature, healthy and spiritually grounded personalities; to helping them face and master challenges for their system of values, personal convictions, and individual needs. It’s not about quick results or a major achievement, but rather about the small changes that are easier to integrate into everyday life, and that can make a big difference in the long run—even if they at first appear to be unspectacular. The exciting thing is that both the mentor and the mentee benefit from and are blessed in this process, “not as an end in itself, but as a blessing for the people around them.”⁸⁵

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *In which area of your life are you yearning for change?*
- ❓ *In which areas would you like to grow?*
- ❓ *Who could help you?*
- ❓ *For whom could you be a help and support?*
- ❓ *Read the quote here. Who has demonstrated their patience with you in your life? Where is patience required from you?*

“The grass doesn’t grow any faster when you pull it.”

African proverb

MENTORING AS EMPOWERMENT

FOCAL POINT → 1 Corinthians 12:7

› FOCUS

Every human being has gifts and strengths that he or she was born with, or that developed in the course of time through the challenges of life. In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote that, beyond that, God has entrusted each believer with a spiritual gift that she or he should use for the benefit of the church (1 Cor. 12:7). He then went on to make it clear just how important each gift and each individual in the church is: “Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not! So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts” (1 Cor. 12:29–31, NLT).

Out of fear of being boastful, or because of misconceived humility, Christians are more in danger of underestimating the value of their own gifts and neglecting them. That makes it all the more important to have a mentor who helps a mentee discover

the capabilities and release the potential that God has placed in him or her. That way, mentees can recognize the purpose, gift and calling which God has prepared for them. That means that, in a healthy mentoring relationship, the mentee embarks on a journey to discover, unfold and develop the gifts God has bestowed upon him, strengthened by the certainty that there is always someone right behind him to give support and who can catch him should he stumble. According to Tobias Faix and Anke Wiedekind, the governing principle in this relationship is to promote independence, maturity and active involvement. They describe this in the framework of the mentoring process with the following five steps:

1. I do it, you watch.
2. I do it, you help.
3. You do it, I help.
4. You do it, I watch.
5. You do it, and another mentee watches you.⁸⁶

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ② Ask a person whom you trust to write down all the strengths, gifts and skills that she or he sees in you, and then talk about them together.
- ② Why is it sometimes easier to criticize others than to seek and openly acknowledge their strengths? Say a word of praise or acknowledgment to those around you.

“When we treat him [a man] as if he already was what he potentially could be, we make him what he should be.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German poet, 1749–1832

MENTORING AS BEING AN EXAMPLE

P5

FOCAL POINT → 1 Corinthians 11:1

› FOCUS

Mentoring follows a simple principle: learn from your role models! For the mentor, this means being a role model. Paul emphasized this in his letters. He wrote to the Corinthians: “So I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:16, NLT). “And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 10:34, NLT [11:1 in other translations]). Paul encouraged the young church in Corinth to take him as an inspiration and to strive to emulate him as a role model. He oriented himself on Jesus, and the church in Corinth was supposed to follow his example in that respect. When we read statements like these, that may at first seem quite boastful, perhaps even arrogant. A quote from the Jewish Mishnah can help us better understand Paul’s statement in the context of his cultural environment: “May you try so hard to be like your rabbi—may you follow him with so much enthusiasm, passion and dedication as you walk behind your rabbi—that your whole face is covered with the rabbi’s dust. May you be covered with the dust of your rabbi’s feet.”⁸⁷ Only those who, like Paul, can wholeheartedly say that they are truly following in the footsteps of Jesus (that is, walking in the dust cloud kicked up by His feet) can rightfully claim that

they are a role model others should follow. Role models can still be role models even if they sometimes stumble or take a step in the wrong direction. If they stay on the right path, if Jesus is the Rabbi leading them, then not just Paul, but anyone who is truly covered by the dust from the feet of Jesus, can make such a claim and be a role model.

We often have an expectation of perfection in connection with role models, which makes it hard to view yourself as a role model: especially when the stark realities of everyday life make it seem that our failures seem to outweigh everything else. That makes it all the more important for young people to experience relationships with adults who live authentically, including their doubts and difficulties, who demonstrate how faith and everyday life can be lived in the midst of mistakes and despite failures. Young people need a role model who inspires them and from whom they can learn, someone they would like to be like someday. Just like Paul urged the Corinthians to imitate him as a role model, adults today should also muster up the courage to help young people, be an inspiration for them, and encourage them to imitate their lives. Each one of us is called to be a role model and mentor.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *When you look at the people around you, who is a role model for you?*
- ❓ *For whom could you be a role model?*
- ❓ *What comes to mind when you think about yourself as being someone that other people could orient themselves on?*

*“Be what you want
your disciples to be.”*

Thomas Carlyle⁸⁸

MENTORING IS MULTIPLICATION

P6

FOCAL POINT → 2 Timothy 2:2

› FOCUS

Whether in business or educational institutions, the purpose of mentoring is clear: The goal is for younger partners to benefit from the experience of the older, and develop their own capabilities. It is also important for experienced and mature Christians to support others in their development and faith, and to pass on their own experience.

That is what Jesus did with His disciples so that they would become multipliers that He could send out as His ambassadors at the end of their journey together here on earth.

Barnabas invested time and effort in Paul, and later he also invested in other younger coworkers whom he supported and took with him on his travels. Just how important it was for Paul to pass on the learning gained becomes clear in what he wrote in his second letter to Timothy, his own mentee: “You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others” (2 Tim. 2:2, NLT). Mentoring is geared toward multiplication and always includes passing on the knowledge, insights and experience you yourself have gained. Jesus Himself said: “Students are not greater than their teacher. But the student who is fully trained will become like the teacher” (Luke 6:40, NLT).

Jesus had a clear goal: The student was to become like the teacher. The goal of mentoring is for mentees to become mentors themselves and to support others as they grow and mature. The remarkable thing about Paul’s relationship to Timothy is that

he stayed in contact with him. After a time of intensive support and supervision on their travels together, Paul continued to give him guidance in letters. And, when Paul was imprisoned in Rome, and almost all of his companions had abandoned him (2 Tim. 4:6–22), it was Timothy who remained faithful to him. Thus the mentoring relationship later became a source of strength and support for the former mentor and teacher.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What have older members of the church, your parents, grandparents or older siblings, conveyed that has impressed you, that has become important for you?
- ❓ What would you like to pass on to others?

“They made disciples out of people who themselves were able to make disciples of other people. Thus the kingdom of God soon rested on many shoulders and was prepared to overcome the trials faced in the early years.”

Tobias Faix und Anke Wiedekind⁸⁹

*“Example is not the main thing in influencing others.
It is the only thing.”*

Albert Schweitzer, French-German theologian and philosopher, 1875–1965

TRAINING

12



May this study encourage you to participate in or create opportunities for training in order to foster and promote awareness and understanding, individual gifts and capabilities, and service and ministries.

TRAINING

BP

FOCAL POINT → 2 Timothy 2:1–2

› MOTIF

Churches that value training are learning churches that make it possible for all members to expand their knowledge, improve their individual gifts and continue to learn and develop in their service for God. Young people in particular have many talents, but these need to be recognized, appreciated and promoted. With the diverse tasks in its ministry, the church needs all these gifts, and many young people are ready to apply them in the work of the church. However, they need training and support—primarily in the context and everyday life of their local church, and not just at periodic events. These churches therefore support their members to help them take advantage of training and seminars that are offered in the local church or conference etc. Ellen White wrote the following about the training of young people by the church: “With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world!”⁹⁰

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: Training is a top-level concern

Jesus as the head of the church has gathered very diverse people together in one church. He is of the opinion that each individual with her or his potential can contribute to ensuring that the “whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Eph. 4:16, NLT).

- ❓ *What opportunities and restrictions for the life of the church arise as a result of the different personalities?*
- ❓ *What skills are needed to build up the church?*
- ❓ *Where do you see the strengths of your church?*
- ❓ *Where do you see potential for growth?*

Perspective 2: Training means expecting to find potential

Each individual member of the church, whatever age, has abilities and knowledge to contribute. Sometimes this potential is not immediately apparent, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. When we approach others with the attitude that everyone has valuable skills, it helps us to discover skills in others and encourages our sisters and brothers to use them for the benefit of the church.

- ❓ *Which hobby fascinates you?*
- ❓ *What is your favorite thing to do in your free time?*
- ❓ *What professional skills are found in your church?*
- ❓ *What could you as a church do with this pool of talent?*

Perspective 3: Training is capital

Capital has to do with investment: investment in the future of the church; investment in the most valuable capital the church possesses—the people. When the church invests in the capabilities of its members, supports and trains individuals, and encourages them in turn to train others, it generates growth and strengthens their bond of identification with the church.

- ❓ *Did you ever participate in a training program where you really learned a lot and from which you still benefit today? What made this training so special?*
- ❓ *What characteristics must a trainer have so that others can learn and benefit from him or her?*
- ❓ *What characteristics does a learner need in order to benefit from training?*

Perspective 4: Training means development

Anyone who takes part in training and education takes the risk of being changed. It is through knowledge that personal development takes place. When the learning process is supported with much wisdom, people find encouragement in dealing with the challenges in their lives, and develop their own understanding of what it means to act justly, as well as the ability to live their lives wisely.

- ❓ *In which situations do you think wisdom is absolutely necessary?*
- ❓ *What is it that distinguishes a wise person?*
- ❓ *Have you met such a person?*
- ❓ *What impact did this encounter have on your personal development?*

Perspective 5: Training means sharing life stories

Fathers at the time of Moses were advised to tell their children the story of the people of Israel. They were supposed to tell them about their fate as slaves in Egypt, and how God liberated them from this tribulation. We, too, can tell stories about how we have experienced liberation in our lives. Personal stories can help listeners grow and develop in their own faith.

- ❓ *We all have certainly experienced what it is like to have someone tell or read us stories. Which stories have stuck in your mind until today?*

- ❓ *Are there any biographies of important personalities that fascinate you? How have they influenced you?*
- ❓ *Sometimes a storyteller can lull you to sleep, while there are others where you hang on every word they say. What makes someone a really good storyteller in your eyes?*

Perspective 6: Training means a lifelong desire to learn

We accumulate knowledge piece-by-piece: for example, when we get to know other people inside and outside the church, through school, higher education and vocational training. Sometimes we encounter people who are so hungry for knowledge that they never seem to get enough and always keep learning, so that we might ask ourselves if we could ever be finished with learning.

- ❓ *Do you know anyone who is hungry for knowledge? What makes them stand out?*
- ❓ *“You never stop learning.” What do you think about this claim? Where do you see limits for how much we can learn?*
- ❓ *How can we maintain the desire to keep learning?*

TRAINING IS A TOP-LEVEL CONCERN

FOCAL POINT → Ephesians 4:11–16

› FOCUS

Sometimes we may have the impression that the church is a random collection of people with very different characters, values and lifestyles. We may hear things like: “We lack capable workers.” “How is constructive collaboration supposed to work in this place?” “If I had been elected to lead the church, I would do everything differently!” “The way he’s going about doing things, it just can’t work.”

We look at our fellow sisters and brothers from our human perspective, quickly pass judgment and often can’t find anything good. The verse in Ephesians opens up the divine perspective for us, which is the way we should look at our church. The verse speaks of Jesus Himself as the head of the church who wanted to bring exactly this colorful bunch of people in one church. It was His intention for them to work together to build His church.

“He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)

He sees the potential in each individual and has a clear idea of who He wants to use in what way. He appointed one to be a teacher, because he could speak so well; another revealed the gift of pastoral counseling and He gave him the task of shepherding the church; in a third He saw the ability to think ahead and see now what the future could bring, and gave him the task of pointing that out to the church in a kind and compassionate way. He encouraged each individual to take over the specific responsibilities according to her or his gifts. Jesus was certainly not unrealistic in His expectations. He was well aware that they would not all master everything well right from the start. But He equipped each one so that they could grow and “become mature” (Ephesians 4:13, NIV).

If we look at our brothers and sisters in the church from this perspective, we will stop calling each other into question. If we view each church member as a coworker chosen by Jesus Christ Himself, it will change our attitude toward each other. If we use our own gifts with this awareness, working together to build up the church, we will experience the blessings promised at the end of the passage: “so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (v. 16, NLT).

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

❓ *Today, pray for a sister or brother in your church whose involvement you have always viewed negatively in the past, and thank God for the fact that this person in particular is part of your church, and that Jesus considers both of you to be capable of working together to build up the church.*

TRAINING MEANS EXPECTING TO FIND POTENTIAL

P2

FOCAL POINT → Exodus 36–39 / Exodus 35:30–35 / 1 Chronicles 22:14–16

› FOCUS

Since as early as the end of the 17th century, education has been considered one of the most valuable cultural commodities. It is through education that you can be integrated into society and secure the basic needs of existence. This great value was already understood in Old Testament times. Back then, specialization in a particular field of work was the life insurance for the whole family. The Bible passages listed above are about building the Hebrew sanctuary. Moses and David were responsible for the construction. They were called by God to oversee everything and build the sanctuary according to His instructions. But neither Moses nor David had the necessary knowledge for this. And so we read about diverse professional skills with which individuals among the people of Israel made a contribution. The passages speak of specialist artistic knowledge and expertise, of skilled craftsmanship in working with wood, iron, precious metals etc. This wealth of professional qualifications was necessary in order

“The LORD has given them special skills as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple, and scarlet thread on fine linen cloth, and weavers. They excel as craftsmen and as designers.”

Exodus 35:35 (NLT)

to build the sanctuary according to God’s design. And the wisest thing that Moses and David could do was to take advantage of the existing potential.

We have also been called by God to fulfill a purpose. God desires to build up His church together with us, and beyond that also His kingdom. And He doesn’t leave us in the dark about how He expects that to be done. The Bible speaks of unity in thinking and action in building up the church (1 Cor. 1:10), of love for each other by which the world will recognize that we are building His church (John 13:35), and of hospitality (Heb. 13:2; Luke 14:21–22). And, beyond the fundamental social competencies listed here, just as in the time of Moses, so now in the church today, we are to keep our eyes and ears open so that we can recognize the potential of individual members. As a church, we don’t have to start with nothing, and we also don’t need to wait until we have learned everything we will ever need to know before we begin working to build up the church. No, one thing is certain: each individual member of the church, whatever age, has abilities and knowledge to contribute! And we are called to take initiative and put our own gifts to work to serve the church, as well as to discover the potential slumbering in our sisters and brothers and inspire them to do the same.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What skills do you have that no one in your church knows about yet?
- ❓ How could you put that to work for the benefit of the church?
- ❓ Find a creative possibility and share it in the Bible discussion group on Sabbath.

TRAINING IS CAPITAL

P3

FOCAL POINT → 1 Chronicles 15:22 / Galatians 6:6

› FOCUS

Training is capital. Isn't that a bit too calculating? Do we provide training so that we can earn profit, to generate capital? Isn't that rather something for businesses? What does that have to do with the life of a church?

The previous study helped us to understand that each individual church member has knowledge to contribute that is often used so professionally in the context of the church that church life benefits notably from it. But something we haven't given consideration to yet is the aspect of sustainability. Training will sustainably strengthen the church and help it grow when specialists do not just use their knowledge themselves or keep it to themselves, but rather train and guide others in their special skills and pass on their knowledge.

When the church invests in the capabilities of its members, it generates growth and strengthens their bond of identification with the church.

The verse in 1 Chronicles 15:22 tells us about Chenaniah, a music specialist. Besides his duties of leading out in song at worship, he also was an instructor (NKJV) of others. He trained members of the Israelite community who showed interest in singing. His skills should benefit them just as much as the community as a whole. Chenaniah was intentionally chosen as an instructor in the area of music in order to train others as multipliers. Churches that also act according to this principle build up the church in a sustainable way. They think further than just today, and invest time, energy and money in the promotion of young talents. Yes, money too! Churches that are willing to invest in their future will also honor the work of the specialists by providing for them. Paul even recommended that in his letter to the Galatians: "Those who are taught the word of God should provide for their teachers, sharing all good things with them" (Gal. 6:6, NLT). When the church invests in the capabilities of its members, supports and trains individuals, and encourages them in turn to train others, it generates growth and strengthens their bond of identification with the church.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ Think about the skill that came to mind in the Practical Perspective section of the previous study. What additional training would help you to develop that skill further? Do some research to find some possibilities.
- ❓ Which person in your church would you like to pass on your knowledge to? Ask the person if she or he could imagine getting involved in the same area of church life that you thought of in the previous study.

TRAINING MEANS DEVELOPMENT

FOCAL POINT → 2 Chronicles 1:10–13; 9:1–8

› FOCUS

Anyone who takes part in training and education takes the risk of being changed. New knowledge leads us to reflect on what we have learned previously. When the new insights offer a promising perspective, and we have the courage to let go of outdated insights, then development takes place. If we consciously and deliberately enter into a learning process, then we can be certain that our thoughts and behavior will develop further.

In 2 Chronicles 1 we find Solomon's prayer for wisdom. He consciously entered into a learning process. He was aware that, as the king of Israel, he would encounter situations where wisdom would be the only thing that could help him make the right decisions. Without hesitation, God answered Solomon's prayer. People all over the world of that time heard about the professionalism with which Solomon ruled. It was told everywhere

that in Solomon's kingdom there was no injustice. He was considered to be the wisest king of all times. 2 Chronicles 9 reports how the queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon and learn from him. Today we would say she came as an intern to gain practical experience in Solomon's administration. She accompanied him as he performed his duties, she experienced how he talked with the people, and she witnessed how he made decisions. She saw how much the people benefited from his wisdom (v. 7).

Wisdom in this sense cannot be viewed as purely academic expertise, but must also be understood as practical, professional competence. A businessman who supervises other workers wisely strives to make fair and just decisions. He takes enough time to examine and assess a situation in all its complexity. He avoids drawing hasty conclusions, and seeks to understand the overall situation. People who experience such wise support in difficult situations find encouragement and develop an understanding of their own for what it means to act justly, as well as the ability to live their lives wisely.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ① *Think of a current challenge in your life, a conflict or a difficult decision. Ask God for wisdom in dealing with it, being confident that He will gladly give generously (James 1:5).*

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr, American theologian, 1892–1971

TRAINING MEANS SHARING LIFE STORIES

P5

FOCAL POINT → Deuteronomy 6:20–25 / Acts 18:25

› FOCUS

Fathers at the time of Moses had the duty of telling their children about the slavery in Egypt and how God had liberated His people. This story would help the subsequent generations recognize God as the God who cares for the needs of us humans. Thanks to this understanding, the children were then able to discover God's providential acts in their own lives. Through the testimonies about the miraculous deeds of God, they developed faith and trust of their own.

The principle of telling the story of one's own liberation still leads again and again to individual spiritual growth and to decisions for God, not just in children and youth, but in all who are seeking answers. When people are asked what convinced them that God still has a meaning for their lives today, the answers are often similar: "Because my parents were always talking about how they experienced Him." "Because I heard someone's testimony at their baptism that was very authentic." "Because people talked about how God freed them from fear, dependency, and existential danger."

The stories of our experiences in life and faith have a dynamic power that should not be underestimated. People who hear them begin to reflect on their own lives. In some cases, it can even be as far-reaching as with Apollos of Alexandria, as told in the book of Acts. The stories of the life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus caused Apollos to reflect on his Jewish faith so thoroughly that he had to tell others about his new insights. His previous knowledge grew and developed to the realization: "Jesus is the Messiah we have been waiting for God to send!" (cf. Acts 18:25). Apollos became

a proclaimer of a new faith that led to a paradigm shift for many. Through his "training," he not only experienced growth in his own understanding of Jesus, but beyond that he also developed greater competence for telling others about this new knowledge.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Write down your own story about how Jesus has saved you from what had been enslaving you, how you began to understand that this Jesus indeed has something to do with your life, and when you realized that you no longer wanted live without Him.

❓ To whom would you like to read your story?

The principle of telling the story of one's own liberation still leads again and again to individual spiritual growth and to decisions for God.

TRAINING MEANS A LIFELONG DESIRE TO LEARN

P6

FOCAL POINT → 1 Corinthians 13:9–12 / Revelation 22:5

› FOCUS

We human beings are lifelong learners. From birth until the grave, we are in a continual process of development. New knowledge is continually being added and old ways of thinking are constantly being changed. This is an insight discovered by research in the field of developmental psychology and has dispelled the myth that a person could ever know everything there is to know. Knowledge and understanding are permanently changing and developing, not only by specific training in an educational system, but also by individual life experiences.

We accumulate knowledge piece by piece: for example, when we get to know other people inside and outside the church, through school, higher education and vocational training. And sometimes we encounter people who are so hungry for knowledge that they never seem to get enough and always keep learning, so that we might ask ourselves if we could ever be finished with learning.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “All that I know now is partial and incomplete” (1 Cor. 13:12, NLT). All human knowledge about me as a person, about other human beings, and about the world in general is incomplete, and will only be complete when Jesus returns and we meet Him face-to-face. “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Cor. 13:12). Then we will suddenly understand the interconnectedness of events throughout world history, in society and in our personal lives in all their complexity.

An individual’s specific learning and education, knowledge and personality, values, moral standards and religious beliefs will all go with him into eternal life. The totality of our existence will then be refined by Jesus, our Mentor. And that’s not everything: “And they will see his face. . . . And they will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:4–5, NLT). In carrying out the task of ruling in eternity, and in fellowship with other believers and with God, each individual will be constantly developing. That means that training and education are not just an investment in this earthly life here and now, but also have consequences and relevance for eternal life.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Think about the things in daily life that you invest a lot of your time and energy in.

- ❓ What knowledge do you gain that way?
- ❓ What values become important for you?
- ❓ What attitudes and beliefs develop in you?

Training and education are not just an investment in this earthly life here and now, but also have consequences and relevance for eternal life.

“Discipleship is about continuing education. We see this life of Jesus with regard to all His followers. . . . Two-thirds of Jesus’ work was education. Continuing education means continuous learning for those who want to be effective. . . . Jesus indeed told His disciples that they would carry on learning through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).”

Leaderwell Pohsngap, “Leadership and Discipleship” in *A Guide to Leadership*, ed. Titre Andre (London: Ashford Press, 2010), p. 42.

LEADING

13



May you be encouraged to share your vision for the church with others, to develop goals together, and to take responsibility for leadership!

LEADING

FOCAL POINT → **Philippians 4:8–9; 2:1–11 / Matthew 20:20–28 / 1 Corinthians 12 / Acts 9:22–27; 11:19–26 / John 15:1–8**

› MOTIF

A strategic and goal-oriented church does not just give attention to administrative processes. It is much rather intentionally missional and oriented on continued development, progress and growth in all areas. It has or develops a vision and a mission for its local community and is constantly seeking to involve all members—including the youth—in the continuous development, analysis and evaluation of the vision and goals. It constantly reminds all in the church of the vision and actively includes young people in the leadership activities of the church. Just how seriously a church takes its young people is often revealed by how much youth are included at all levels of the leadership processes. When young people are involved in leadership, they will perceive the church as **their** church and work together to shape the activities and the mission of the church.

› FOCUS

Perspective 1: What does leadership mean?

Leadership means influence, and each of us has influence. Therefore, each of us is also a leader: whether we want to be or not. In Philippians 4:8–9 Paul encourages the church to live according to his example. He is obviously also convinced that we lead more by our example than anything else.

- ❓ *How can I use my influence to help young people and guests find a supportive spiritual home and feel accepted in my church?*
- ❓ *Review the list of iCOR values: Connecting, Caring, Participating, Worshiping, Teaching, Serving, Reconciling, Mentoring, Training and Leading. Which values do you adhere to strongly in your life? In which areas do you want to grow? What would be of help for you?*

Perspective 2: Goal-oriented leadership

If I want to lead, I must know where the journey is supposed to go. With its values, iCOR provides us with a helpful framework. The values are like guardrails beside the road that help us stay on course, moving in the right direction toward our goal of becoming a family for everyone.

- ❓ *What concrete goals need to become reality in your church in order to come closer to this goal?*
- ❓ *Which things could be given less priority because they don't serve the desired goal?*

Perspective 3: Servant leadership

Our God is a Servant God (Phil. 2:1–11). Therefore, we must always view leadership in the sense of serving others. We do not seek honor and power. If we hold a certain church office, it is not we ourselves who are at the focus of attention, but rather we focus our attention on seeking what is best for others. It is only when others can clearly see that we seek to serve them with our leadership that they will be willing to follow our lead.

- ❓ *Do you always seek the best for others in the work you do in the church?*
- ❓ *How can you protect yourself against thirst for power and pride?*
- ❓ *How do you feel and react when the church makes a decision and acts contrary to what you want?*

Perspective 4: Gift-oriented leadership

The gifts we have been given provide us an idea of what God has planned for us: because it is with precisely these gifts that we can and should help build up the church. That's why it's so important for us to discover the spiritual gifts our brothers and sisters have, and to support and encourage each other to put them to work, experiment with and unfold them.

- ❓ *We invest time and energy and money in everything that is important to us. How can others see that God is important to you?*
- ❓ *Which spiritual gifts do you have?*
- ❓ *Where does God have a place in your busy schedule?*

Perspective 5: Empowering leadership

Leadership means supporting others and helping them to develop their potential. And that begins with believing in them. That means recognizing the potential that

lies in them and giving them the opportunity (empowering them) to fully unfold it. Barnabas did this deliberately with Saul (Acts 11:25–26).

- ❓ *How can you discover the potential that lies in others in the church?*
- ❓ *What can you do to help others in the church find the courage to try out their gifts?*

Perspective 6: Passionate leadership

What we need is a passionate, enthusiastic attitude. There is a fascinating aspect of our attitude: it is very contagious. People sense instinctively when someone is really on fire for a cause and when someone is only pretending. God alone can implant this enthusiasm in our hearts (John 15:1–8).

- ❓ *How do you live out your relationship with God?*
- ❓ *Are you satisfied with how it is?*
- ❓ *What could intensify the connection?*
- ❓ *How could your church help and support you in that?*
- ❓ *What current concerns or issues do you think are heartbreaking for God to see?*
- ❓ *Is there an issue for which you share a burning passion with Him?*

WHAT DOES LEADERSHIP MEAN?

FOCAL POINT → **Philippians 4:8–9 / Numbers 13:27–14:23**

› FOCUS

There are many definitions of leadership. But the most simple comes from John C. Maxwell: “The true measure of leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less.”⁹¹ Leadership is therefore about the ability to find coworkers: people who pull together and work toward the same goal.

The important thing is that the elected leaders are not the only ones with influence in the church, but that **every one of us** has influence. The only question is: in which direction is our influence moving others? Is our influence a “good” or “bad” influence? What are our motives?

In Philippians 4:8–9 Paul encourages the church to live according to his example. He is obviously also convinced that we lead more by our example than anything else.

“God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible—what a pity that we plan only the things we can do by ourselves.”

Aiden Wilson Tozer⁹²

We find another example of how important our personal influence can be in Joshua and Caleb. Both were among the spies who had been sent out to explore the promised land. They reported to the people that it was a wonderful land where everything was in abundance (Num. 14:6–8). They trusted God and wanted to win the people over for the journey. But then there was also the influence of the ten other spies who were afraid of the powerful peoples who lived there (Num. 13:27–33). Although God Himself had promised to lead them to the promised land, they spread such fear that the people almost stoned Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:10). The influence of only ten men led the whole nation astray from the plan of God. The result: none of those individuals ever set foot in the promised land (Num. 14:20–23). If we desire to “influence” the church consistently in terms of the iCOR values, then each of us is called to lead by her or his good example.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *How can I use my influence to help young people and guests find a supportive spiritual home and feel accepted in my church?*
- ❓ *Review the list of iCOR values: Connecting, Caring, Participating, Worshiping, Teaching, Serving, Reconciling, Mentoring, Training and Leading. Which values do you adhere to strongly in your life? In which areas do you want to grow? What would be of help for you?*

GOAL-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP

P2

FOCAL POINT → **Matthew 23:24; 15:14 / Mark 1:32–39**

› FOCUS

If I want to lead, I must know where the journey is supposed to go. What is my vision of the future? What should my church be like; what do we want to focus on as a church? With its values, iCOR provides us with a helpful framework. The values are like guardrails beside the road that help us stay on course, moving in the right direction toward our goal of becoming a family for everyone.

It is important to have a clearly formulated goal and then to organize church life accordingly. The power that lies in such a focus can be seen in the example of light. Indirect light has only little strength or effect. But when it is focused, and thus its energy becomes concentrated, light can develop tremendous power. For example, sunlight focused by a magnifying glass can easily ignite paper, and a laser can be used to cut through thick plates of steel. In the same way, the strength of a church is also increased when its members all pull in the same direction and work toward a common goal.

Jesus also had a clear focus in His ministry, as indicated indirectly in Mark 1:32–39. The hard thing about staying focused is that there are many other “good” things that are outside the scope of focus. In this situation the saying is often true, that the good is the enemy of the best.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ Read Matthew 23:24; 15:14. What problem did the Pharisees have?
- ❓ The goal of iCOR is that your church may become a family for everyone. What concrete goals need to become reality in your church in order to come closer to this goal?
- ❓ Which things could be given less priority because they don't serve the desired goal?
- ❓ Are there areas where your church could focus its energy?

“The worst use of time is to do things perfectly that don't need to be done at all!”

Martin Krengel⁹³

FOCAL POINT → Matthew 20:20–28 / Philippians 2:1–11 / John 13:1–5 / Luke 4:16–21

› FOCUS

In our society, a leadership position is associated with power, influence and usually good payment. The boss gets to tell the employees what to do, and they have to obey. The profits must be good enough, the market share must keep growing, and a polished image must be maintained. The interesting thing is that Jesus had a completely different focus when it comes to leadership. For Him, it wasn't just about Himself and His own success. For Jesus, it's first and foremost about you and me! He wants the best for us. He wants to serve us (Luke 4:16–21). For Jesus, the results are not the most important thing, but rather people! This is a completely new concept of leadership: that is, “servant leadership.”

In this context, I find John 13:1–5 particularly moving. At this moment, Jesus is fully aware of all His power. He knows that He has come from the Father and will return to Him. He knows that the Father has put **everything** in His hands. 100 percent power. Everything belongs to Jesus. But Jesus pours water in a bowl and washes the dirty feet of His disciples: the work of a slave!

Our God is a Servant God. Therefore, we must always view leadership in the sense of serving others. We do not seek honor and power. If we hold a certain church office, it is not we ourselves who are at the focus of attention, but rather we focus our attention on seeking what is best for others. It is only when others can clearly see that we seek to serve them with our leadership that they will be willing to follow our lead.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ What has Jesus done to serve you?
- ❓ How is He serving you now?
- ❓ Do you always seek the best for others in the work you do in the church?
- ❓ How can you protect yourself against thirst for power and pride?
- ❓ How do you feel and react when the church makes a decision and acts contrary to what you want?

“Nothing restrains the unbridled desires of human yearning of the flesh . . . as much as serving, and nothing transforms them as much as hidden service. Our fleshly nature already complains of service, but it literally cries out against serving in secret. It wants honor and recognition.”

Richard J. Foster⁹⁴

GIFT-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP

P4

FOCAL POINT → **Matthew 25:14–30 / 1 Corinthians 12 / Romans 12:1**

› FOCUS

God has put a unique tool in our hands for the leadership of the church—the priesthood of all believers. That means that God created all believers as unique individuals and equipped each one with spiritual gifts. The gifts we have been given provide us with an idea of what God has planned for us: because it is with precisely these gifts that we can and should help build up the church. By contrast, it can be very difficult and tiring for us, and bears no good fruit, if our work is outside the scope of the gifts we have been given.

That's why it's so important for us to discover the spiritual gifts our brothers and sisters have, and to support and encourage each other to put them to work, experiment with and unfold them. This is particularly true for the youth in our church—if we take the history of the church seriously, that is. Because in the Bible, as well as throughout the history of the church, it was above all the young people that carried the church forward. Besides, their participation (the opportunity to help shape the church) will also strengthen their identification with the church.

In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30), it becomes clear how serious God is about how we use our gifts. Because the third servant is “wicked and lazy” (v. 26, NLT), he is the only one that gets punished—not because he has done something bad; no: he hasn't done **anything at all!** He hasn't even managed to take the money to a bank in order to earn some interest. In other words: my love for God can be seen in what I do for Him and my fellow human beings (Rom. 12:1).

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *We invest time, energy and money in everything that is important to us. How can others see that God is important to you?*
- ❓ *Which spiritual gifts do you have?*
- ❓ *Where does God have a place in your busy schedule?*

*“If you don't live it,
you don't believe it.”*

Paul Harvey⁹⁵

FOCAL POINT → Acts 9:22–27; 11:19–26

› FOCUS

Barnabas is one of the unsung heroes of the Bible. He did not bear his name without reason, which means “son of consolation” (Acts 4:36, KJV). Or, as The Living Bible formulates it, he was called “Barnabas, the encourager” because he was so dedicated to helping and comforting others. He saw the potential in others, believed in them and supported them. None of the other disciples believed that Saul, the worst among those who persecuted the Christians, had truly been converted. They thought it was a trick (Acts 9:26–27). Barnabas, however, took a closer look. He recognized that Saul’s conversion was genuine, and vouched for him in the circle of disciples. To lead means to support and promote others. And that begins with believing in them. That means recognizing the potential that lies in them and giving them the opportunity (empowering them) to fully unfold it.

A classic example is of how, in many churches, children collect the offering on Sabbath. This can be an exciting task for them. It only becomes problematic when these children become teenagers and adults whose only role in the church service is still just collecting the offering! Empowering leadership asks the question: how can I help a person continue to grow and develop? What challenge can I give him or her to wrestle with and master? Young people in particular (but also older ones) identify themselves more strongly with their church when they are able to help shape the church. I am convinced that some of the most capable head elders, deacons, pastors and missionaries are to be found in our youth groups—if we specifically support and promote them. Barnabas took care to ensure that Paul could unfold his full potential. And he

was totally selfless in his actions. As you read the texts listed above, you probably noticed that, in the course of the story, the order in which the names are mentioned changes. In the beginning, Barnabas is mentioned first; later it is Paul. In other words: Paul became “greater” than Barnabas. Barnabas was such a self-confident leader that it was absolutely fine with him to step into the shadow of his pupil! That is empowering leadership at its best.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *Is it easier for you to see the problems or the possibilities in other people? Today, deliberately try to see the potential in the people you meet.*
- ❓ *How can you discover the potential that lies in others in the church?*
- ❓ *What can you do to help others in the church find the courage to try out their gifts?*

“People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

John C. Maxwell⁹⁶

PASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

P6

FOCAL POINT → John 15:1–8

› FOCUS

Let's imagine we have an exemplary character, we want to serve others, we support the development of their potential, we have a clear goal that we are working toward—even if we fulfill all the aspects of leadership that have been discussed above, that doesn't guarantee that people will follow our lead. As long as one key ingredient is still missing, people will hardly be motivated let us lead them. What we need is a passionate, enthusiastic attitude. As long as I myself am not working passionately to build up God's kingdom, I cannot expect others to catch fire and follow me. As long as I myself am not working passionately to reach a goal, I cannot expect others to sacrifice their time and effort.

There is a fascinating aspect of our attitude: it is very contagious. People sense instinctively when someone is really on fire for a cause and when someone is only pretending. The disciples were clearly passionate in building the kingdom of God. After the out-

pouring of the Holy Spirit, nothing could stop them. They didn't let anyone tell them to stop proclaiming the Gospel, and went forward courageously, even when it cost them their lives. I believe the secret behind this is the fact that they were filled by the Spirit of God. God was dwelling in them, and that's why they were on fire for God's new world. That's even contained in the word "enthusiasm," which is put together from the Greek words *en* (in) and *theos* (God). Only God can plant this enthusiasm in our hearts.

That's why John 15:5 is so incredibly important for leaders: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing" (NLT). Because it is only with this connection that fruit grows, and we can also sense what things are breaking God's heart.

› PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❓ *How do you live out your relationship with God?*
- ❓ *Are you satisfied with how it is?*
- ❓ *What could intensify the connection?*
- ❓ *How could your church help and support you in that?*
- ❓ *What current concerns or issues do you think are heartbreaking for God to see?*
- ❓ *Is there an issue for which you share a burning passion with Him?*

"The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it."

William James⁹⁷

“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, or a home. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. Nor can we change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We also cannot change the inevitable. The only thing that we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you—we are in charge of our attitudes.”

Chuck Swindoll²⁸

GOOD QUESTIONS

“Questions get things moving—good questions will carry you through whole journeys, exciting adventures, and charming encounters.”⁹⁹

In her book *Fragen können wie Küsse schmecken (Questions Can Taste Like Kisses)*, Carmen Kindl-Beilfuss encourages her readers to discover more about other people with the help of good questions, asking them with utmost respect, as if they were VIPs.¹⁰⁰

At the end of her book, she provides a collection of 111 **good** questions.¹⁰¹ Here is a small selection of them. Why don't you try some of them out with the people in your church?

- How can your friends make you happy?
- How would you like to be remembered by your children?
- When was the last time you did something incredibly generous? What effect did that have on the recipients? How generous are you with yourself?
- What is your favorite source of comfort besides chocolate?
- In which situations are you totally in your element, “like a fish in the water”? What can you do best?
- What headline would you like to have written about the impact your life has had on other people?

- In which situation have you unabashedly enjoyed losing your composure or dignity?
- What do you admire the most among the things the people you know have achieved?
- Which animal would you choose to be your companion?
- What kind of music touches you most deeply?
- What have you learned from (your) children?
- When are you satisfied with yourself?
- When you look back at your life, what fills you with pride?
- When was the last time you were really proud of yourself and thought: “I did a really good job with that!”?
- How do you manage to remain true to your principles?
- What makes a day a successful day for you?
- What do people in your church complain about that you think is completely justified or not justified?
- What have you learned from people who are over 80?
- What was the greatest adventure of your life?
- Which fragrance reminds you of your childhood? What are some of your most intense memories from your early childhood?
- What was your biggest childhood dream? And what effect does it now have in your adult life?
- Which piece of clothing or outfit almost automatically puts you in a good mood?



- What is the easiest way to make you laugh?
- How do you measure success in other people? And for yourself?
- What criticism has really helped you grow in your life?
- What little thing made you smile recently?
- Which movie has moved you most deeply so far, and how did it achieve that?
- Where do you feel at home?
- Which bedtime story would be a special treat for you?
- Which moment of your life would you like to have framed as a picture because it was so wonderful?
- How do you treat your body to pure physical well-being?
- With which people can you enjoy a good argument? What is it that makes this kind of argument an interesting kind of relationship?



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Malachi 4:6



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